Journeying to be *in a good way*:
Lessons in Gift-Reciprocity Relations from the Choctaw Nation and the Irish.

by

Ethan Connor Quilty
B.A., University of Victoria, 2022

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Supervisory Committee

Supervisor: Dr. Brent Mainprize (Gustavson School of Business)

Co-Supervisor: Dr. Susanne Thiessen (School of Public Administration)

Committee Member: Dr. Sarah Marie Wiebe (School of Public Administration)

Abstract

Almost two centuries ago, a Nation in need was offered a hand in solidarity from another Nation an ocean away. The resulting relationship formed by this *gift* of support has since resulted in a longstanding, diplomatic and equitable Nation-to-Nation relationship, founded in the principles of gifting and reciprocating. This thesis explores the ongoing *gift-reciprocity relationship* between the Choctaw Nation and the Irish, its origins, history, and impacts. Using a *storywork* methodology, this thesis weaves together personal and shared stories to provide a practical guide to being *in a good way*. A terminology connected to the processes of reconciliation and reconstruction, being *in a good way* represents a means by which individuals can learn, reflect, and act upon their positionality to be better allies, advocates, and collaborators. Through the exploration of personal and shared stories, in addition to historical examples, this thesis confirms that the ongoing relationship between these Nations is unique and important for relationship-building efforts for other Nations, individuals, communities and organizations. From this relationship, this thesis offers several key actions that could guide readers to begin their own journeying *in a good way*.

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Thanking Land, Place and People

I wish to acknowledge and thank, with respect, the Lək̓ʷəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the university I attend stands, as well as the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose relationships with this land, these waters and places are ongoing. Much of my time over the last few years here has been spent on the territories of the Pacheedaht and Ditidaht peoples, as well as the ƛaʔuukʷiʔatḥ Nations, and thus, I wish to also acknowledge and thank them, with respect. Their territories are all places of great inspiration and *good* energy to me. Many thanks to the Choctaw Nation, whose relationships form the basis of this work. I hope to visit your territory and people someday. Last, but not least, I wish to acknowledge and thank, with respect, the people, families and communities of the Secwépemc Nation, whose sacred territory, *Secwepemcúl̓ecw*, I have visited and called home throughout this life.

Acknowledgements

This project is not the culmination of a journey – rather, I'd like to think of it as a snapshot of a process of *journeying*. The journey is ongoing. In any case, this process would not have been possible without the support of many brilliant, generous, and caring individuals. It represents an expression of all that has been shared with me over the past few years. It is a letter of thanks to all the people, places and Nations whose stories are represented here.

To my supervisors and committee, Dr. Brent Mainprize, Dr. Susanne Thiessen and Dr. Sarah Marie Wiebe. Brent, you took a chance on me in the winter of 2021 by hiring me as a research assistant and supported me in working on the Nationhood Support Initiative. You opened the door to being *in a good way* to me, and for that, I am incredibly grateful. Susanne, you were among the first to encourage me to write about something personal, to tell some stories, and to take a risk. Thank you. I wish to express my gratitude to both of you for signing off (many, many times) on a student's dream pursuit. Sarah, thank you for supporting this project and providing guidance on my writing. The community that we built in the MACD summer institute was a highlight of my graduate experience.

To my professors at the University of Victoria, many of whom deserve much more credit here than I have allotted. Dr. Darcy Lindberg, for showing me the importance of telling stories. I was greatly inspired by our discussions of your own thesis work. Your teachings and *good feelings* are instrumental to this project. *Tansi*. To Dr. Keith Cherry and Dr. Pablo Ouziel. You both changed my life and challenged me in ways I never imagined. Our work together in starting the COVIDA Collective encouraged me to seek a path that *spoke* to me.

To *Kilslaay Kaajii Sding* Miles Richardson, Maryantonett Flumian, Darrin Mah, Madeleine Northcote and Jacquie Miller. Many thanks for your ongoing support and guidance for our work together on the Nationhood Support Initiative.

To Javier Francis Dichupa and Noah Hathaway. Many thanks for welcoming me into your *story worlds*. Javier, you have always been an incredible support in reading my work and giving thoughts and contributions. I would like to think that this has been good for the program.

To my dear friends. Nowa, Row, Torb, Nate, Mosh and Livy, James, Colly, Sach, Noah and Mark. You all make me, me. For the most part, we grew up in the same town, on the same street. Torb once said that he likes to think of our friendships as a conversation that started a long time ago and has never really stopped. It has taken turns, moved, and changed, but at its core, it is the same. Here's to all the twists and turns, ups and downs of that ongoing conversation, and all that is to come. I also must particularly thank Nowa. This thesis would not exist without many of the conversations that have resulted from long drives along Highway 14, across Vancouver Island, and around the world, searching for surf.

To Simonne. You sat with me while I stared at the mountaintop, dreamt about what the view might look like, and walked with me every step of the way. Here's to the next summit together. I love you.

To my family. Without you, the *circle of reciprocity* would be incomplete. There are many of you. Each of you forms the foundation of my being. I must highlight a few of you, but for those who aren't named, again, thank you.

To Uncle Martin. You taught me what *meitheal* means and have been a guiding voice for me at various points in this life. I am grateful for your sharing of stories, and your pushing me to develop my own *storywork*. You embody the *meitheal philosophy* every day. This project is

merely the beginning of my efforts to do the same. Auntie Trish, Marty, Eils, Eve and Vik. You all showed me a kindness that I will forever try to repay. I look forward to many more adventures through the forty shades of *home*. Marcie, Darragh, Petey, Robby and Lucas– many thanks for all the good times had, and all those to come. Ellie and the Farrells, the spirit of Connaught seems to flow through us all. Many thanks. Ebbie, our conversations about the Irish dream remind me of how I hope things end.

To my aunt and uncles on the Quilty side. Jacquie, we share a passion for the stories and for the emerald isle. I'm already looking forward to our next trip. Donal, you have always modelled selflessness that we could never replicate. Eddie and Nat, thank you for sharing your passion for the Island, the surf and the sea with me. Here's to the next wave.

To the Tracz / Camp side. Sharon and Harry Tracz, thank you for bringing us all together through the wonderful place that is "The Lot". Grandma, I'm looking forward to learning how to do a headstand with you. Auntie Charlene and Uncle Darren, thank you for always welcoming me to Port and helping the Island be my chosen home.

To Daniel "Donie" Quilty and Lilian Deirdre (Costello) Quilty. Thank you for your sacrifices. Your moving to Canada has given us all the opportunities that we now have. Thanks for sharing your stories, as they inform the foundation of this work and represent some of my deepest passions. And above all, thank you for modelling a form of relationality with other people that is accepting, understanding and inquisitive, equally. You have demonstrated what it means to be a *good visitor*. Ireland is more than just a country, or island, to all of us. For me, it represents people - individuals who have contributed to the essence of all our lives in a myriad of ways, some of which we still can't seem to figure out. Thank you for being the small patch of culture and identity that flows from this far-off place.

To my cousins. Heather, Daniella, Braya, Finnley and Fia Bean. I love you all very much and thank you for each bringing special memories and dynamics to my life.

To my siblings, with my deepest love and respect, Landon, Caitlin and Greg. Landon, you have the biggest heart of anyone. Thank you for always reminding me about the things that truly matter most. Caitlin, thank you for inspiring me with your hard work, passion and strength. You are a force of nature and a flower in the field. Greg, you are the most honest, just and loyal person I know. Thank you for being both a best friend and an older brother. The hardest truths need to be heard, just as the biggest questions need to be asked.

To my parents, John Quilty and Nadine Quilty. Thank you for modelling partnership, friendship, compassion, understanding and love. Thank you for giving us the opportunities to pursue our passions, to live *intentionally* and to be considerate of other beings. You are both educators and pillars of our community. I hope to be able to share the lessons you have given me with this world. I love you both, forever.

Dedication

This project is dedicated in three ways.

First, to the lands, waterways, mountains, oceans and places that I have visited and called *home*.

Next, to all my relations that have been, all those that are, and all those yet to *be*.

And lastly, to all those who wrote the *songs*.[1]

Táim buíoch díbh go léir. Kukwstsétsemc. I raise my hands to all of *you*.

- Ethan Connor Quilty, Musqueam territory, October 2023.

[1] The Irish Poet Frank Harte once said that "those in power wrote the history, while those who suffered wrote the songs". Let us all join and work together to make new music.

Chapter 1: Introduction

"Stories weave webs of meaning into the fabric of our lives. We all live in story worlds."

- Miller Mair.

Craobh Chomtarta

The grass shakes and sways, dancing as the morning winds carry it back and forth. Crisp and wet, it seeps through our shoes as we trudge along the overgrown gravel lane that winds up the hill above. It is a November morning, windy, cloudy, but not rainy – a rare treat this winter in *Eire*. We had parked on the side of the rural road, alongside a rusty gate. The road is a series of winding, hedge and famine-wall lined spurs that dot the various farms, properties and small cottages in this corner of the county. A few yards ahead of me, my gran-uncle John is strolling along the laneway. He is walking with ease, his demeanour giving off a sense of peace and respect that only comes from a feeling of connection – to something, somewhere, or someone.

The graveyard is a ways above us, up on a hillside. It's overrun by greenery, and there isn't space for new burials anymore. Now, the "new" graveyard, a few kilometres away, is where everyone is laid. In retrospect though, I'm told that this is considered the "new" graveyard – even though some of the headstones date back to the 17th century and earlier, their markers being simple cobbles or in some cases, nothing at all. In the middle, a few lowly ash trees, and a single yew shrouded in ivy sit tall and strong, watching over everyone. The headstones that bear my name are in a corner – there are three, and below them, there are a few small patches of gravel. They are dotted with various names; some I recognize and others I don't. One has begun to crumble, its granite pieces falling into the pile below it. It is darker now, coated with lichen and moss. I'm not sure if anyone has visited them recently, but I remember my last visit clearly. I remembered being here as if the last five years had passed in a matter of minutes. I remembered the sound of the wind as it blew through the grasses in the fields below, almost surely the

whispers of those around me. I remembered the tree's groans and shudders, the feeling it gave me when I closed my eyes and took a second to imagine. To imagine what an eternity here would feel like.

They are one with the soil below me, and through them, I too, am one with the soil. They are all around me, their whispers blowing the leaves off the trees. They are calling to me, and I feel their warmth on my face. My feet feel the miles they have walked, along these roads, over these hills, and through these fields. Tired from the long journey, and the displacement from their homes in the East. My shoulders feel the weight, too. The weight of their loss – of children, of siblings, of parents, to illness, to pain, to adventure, or the calling of a distant land. My back feels the aches of those who kneeled in the mud, stacking the rocks, and building the walls that surround us, their throats burning from dehydration, their stomachs clenching from hunger, and their hearts tearing from the despair that surrounds them.

As I turn and look to the horizon, I close my eyes again and imagine the arms of my being opening to all that surrounds me. I am putting out all the gratitude and appreciation that my heart can hold. I feel a warmth rising through my toes, the echoes of laughter radiating wishes of well-being to my ears, and the light returning to my shoulders. The circle of reciprocity envelops me, and the wind's voices seem to swell, their tones playing a new song, one that seems to call out a wish of good fortune and care. The song reaches its crescendo and settles into a final melody. A melody of remembrance. *For all those around me, and all those yet to come*.

Waves of Reciprocity

The waves of *reciprocity* that I experienced in the graveyard have rested in my thoughts ever since. Often, those thoughts returned to the stories of the ancestors who had lived with this land for incomprehensible distances and shapes of time, the relations they maintained, and the ongoing lessons they taught me. At this juncture, I should note that said lessons, no matter the

means of their communication, are better expressed as *gifts*. *Gifts*, of experience, knowledge, connection, and care, for both these places and for other beings. *Gifts*, because their passage to my hands conferred upon them a sacred meaning.

Being in that graveyard, I felt the weight of a collective history. A history cultivated through stories of departure, of arrival, and of rest. They were a striking reminder of the tangible relationships we all hold to Land, Place and People. Inevitably, my thoughts equally turned to another side of my being. Though that distant green countryside felt (and continues to feel) like home, my thoughts couldn't help but wander to the other, far-off place that I care for the most – the series of lakes, rivers, mountains, plains, and valleys called *Secwepemcúl̓ecw*[2], in the Interior of British Columbia, Canada. But what for my relations that exist there? How do they differ from these, here in my ancestral home? Moreover - how can these overlapping, intrinsically linked identities be understood? These questions encapsulate the essence of what I hope to explore in this thesis – the profound significance that these gifted, reciprocal relations hold for the propagation of diplomatic, culturally grounded connections between Nations.

That day, my reflection inevitably turned to the events that shaped the lands surrounding me. *What tales could they tell?* Surely, some of the answers wouldn't be hard to find. The walls that surrounded me were built by impoverished labourers, incentivized by small wages of food and rags. A devastating famine had once ravaged this island, crushing its people under a thumb of hunger, disease, and death. No doubt, the scars of its influence remained. Yet, it was another story, a thought of one great, simple, and deeply generous gesture of *gift* by another Nation, across the Atlantic, that held my feelings most.

[2] *Secwepemcúl̓ecw* is the traditional and sacred territory of the Secwépemc ("the spread-out people"), a Salish Nation in the Interior. *Secwepemcúl̓ecw* is a series of great mountains, valleys, plains, forests, rivers and lakes that includes the Shuswap Lake and its surrounding arms and tributaries. I was born and raised in Salmon Arm ("Sxwetsméllp" in Secwepemctsín).

This aforementioned great gesture took place in 1847, at the height of a famine that would eventually see the mass exodus or death of over half the Irish population.[3] On March 23rd, word was received of an overseas fundraising effort that would send over $700 to support Irish women, children and families in recovering from the devastating impacts of the famine.[4] In large part, the donations were organized by a group of citizens from the (then) Choctaw Tribe, a Nation who had recently been forcibly relocated from their traditional territories in (what was colonially considered) Mississippi to the recently formed state of Oklahoma.[5] The Choctaw were no strangers to famine themselves, having experienced the devastating Trail of Tears, a mass-scale forced displacement and string of assimilative policies starting in 1831.[6] These diplomatic relations have long been characterized by the giving of reciprocal gifts, which have contributed to an ongoing meaning for the relations between these Nations.[7] *Gift-reciprocity relations*, as with those demonstrated by the Irish and the Choctaw Nation, support the generation of cross-cultural exchanges that work to decolonize and reconstruct equitable Nation-to-Nation relationships.

Seeing Nation-to-Nation relationships as *gifts* calls for a recognition of the interconnectivities that exist between People, Land, Place, Language and Culture, among others. When a *gift* is given, meaning is conferred upon it, and when it is given again, a cycle of

[3] Kirwan, Padraig. "Recognition, Resilience, Relief: The Meaning of Gift." Journal of Transnational American Studies 13, no. 1 (2022).
[4] *Ibid*
[5] Lambert, Valerie. *Choctaw Nation: a story of American Indian resurgence*. U of Nebraska Press, 2007.
[6] Akers, Donna L. *Living in the land of death: The Choctaw Nation, 1830-1860*. MSU Press, 2004.
[7] In researching the gift-reciprocity relationship between these two Nations, I have tried to work mainly with the published writings of Choctaw scholars and knowledge keepers. I am deeply indebted to Valerie Lambert, Donna Akers, Greg O'Brien and LeAnne Howe, in particular, for their extensive work and *gifts* shared and *reciprocated* in turn. I acknowledge that my doing this work has not included my own visiting to the Choctaw Nation or their territories. It is my intention to do so and pass on the *gifts* they have shared with me – first, as an Irish person, and beneficiary (to various degrees) of their *gift* of relationship shared with my ancestors in 1847, and now, with the necessary stories and other materials for me to complete this thesis project.

meaning and *reciprocity* is generated.[8] Discussions on *gift-reciprocity relations* are not limited to describing relations between human beings. The Potawatomi Citizen Scholar Robin Wall-Kimmerer has long explored the profound impact of the *gift-reciprocity relations* between Nature, Land, Place and Beings, calling for a recognition of the land's gifts as a foundation for sustainable living and ways of being.[9] The historic and ongoing relations between the Irish and the Choctaw Nation invite a critical examination of the role and significance of these relations and their support of Nation-to-Nation diplomacy. Wall-Kimmerer's seminal work, *Braiding Sweetgrass,* presents a means of regarding these relations with both a Western and Indigenous lens, outlining the potential they share for responding to the injustices felt by many.[10] In exploring these examples, this study also works to make connections between concepts and wisdoms shared by Indigenous leaders and scholars and other Nations (i.e. the Irish), all to demonstrate the potential for alternative approaches to diplomacy between peoples. It serves to build bridges of *good* relations and hopes to aid in the processes of decolonization and reconstruction.

Being in a good way

Even amidst so much suffering and despair, the example of one Nation's kindness in providing a *gift* of *relationality* to another could ring out as a universal truth for all Nations – that we exist in an *interconnected web* of relations, bound by the collective spirit of being itself. And from that universal truth, we may reach an understanding – that we may all work together to be *in a good way*. *Being*, in that this practice is active, and both spatially and temporally connected – it is an ongoing action-based process, woven through a journey of reflection. *Good*, in that it

[8] Kimmerer, Robin Wall. "Returning the gift." *Minding Nature* 7, no. 2 (2014): 18-24.
[9] Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed editions, 2013.
[10] *Ibid*

calls for a movement towards positive, relational ways of thinking and being, treating others and the world around us with respect and care. At its core, this project is intended as an opportunity to share a few practical examples of being *in a good way*. These practical examples are offered through a weaving of stories – some personal, through my ongoing practices of journeying to be *in a good way*, and others that I have found through research. Through this *journeying*, as well as several examples of actions that promote these *relational* ways of thinking, being and doing, this thesis demonstrates the potential that being *in a good way* holds for individuals, communities, organizations, or Nations who wish to be better allies in the processes of reconciliation and reconstruction.

Being *in a good way*, as demonstrated through the Irish-Choctaw *gift-reciprocity relationship*, helps to build *relationality*. Building *relationality* supports the deconstruction of unjust frameworks, and in turn, supports reconciliation and reconstruction. Many individuals wish to begin their own process of *journeying*, in the hopes of being a better ally to reconciliation. Yet, they may be concerned as to where this process could start. While there exists a great breadth of resources to support individuals, groups, communities, organizations, or Nations on this path, many of these resources are inaccessible for a variety of reasons. As this project hopes to demonstrate, it is through simple, everyday, *intentional*, and *embodied* practices that being *in a good way* can be found. In these stories, and through this work, I aim to provide a few of the practices I have implemented myself as a potential starting point. This work aims to answer the following summary question: *What significance do Irish-Choctaw gift-reciprocity relations hold for the practice of being in a good way?* Drawing from the existent relations between the Irish and the Choctaw, this thesis endeavours to discern the enduring legacy of these proposed *gift-reciprocity relations*. In exploring these relations, all while practicing journeying,

this thesis argues that being *in a good way* represents a simple, yet powerful opportunity for beings to reconsider their own relationships to the Nations, Beings and Places that surround them.

Giving voice to Place: the Salmon People

The coming of the fall brings an essence of change to *Secwepemcúl̓ecw*.[11] Fall has always been my favourite season. The leaves on the trees go from green to orange, or yellow, to brown. Most of the trees in *Secwepemcúl̓ecw*'s forests are conifers (Douglas Firs) however, and they remain the same colour year-round. Despite this, by October the hills have become a canvas of green, brown, orange and yellow. The mornings are chilly, with small droplets of frosty dew that trace the tips of the grass at the roadsides. All along the lake, the summer water levels have left a dry line at the low mark. The lake grass becomes pale and paper dry. Now, more often than not, we are also experiencing the close of a hard season. *Secwepemcúl̓ecw*, like much of the Interior, has been shrouded in smoke for much of the summer, the result of increasingly devastating wildfires that come because of changing climate, heat and drought. By late autumn, it will not be for a few weeks that the fall rains will come, bringing with them a slight rise in the water levels. With all this in mind, fall is my favourite season because it represents a *renewal* to me, a changing of the tides and the beginning of another year. It also brings with it one of the great highlights of living here – the return of the Salmon.

When I was smaller, the nearby Adams River Sockeye Run was renowned for attracting visitors from all over the world. Every fall, thousands would come to see the Sockeye return,

[11] It is essential to express thanks for the Secwepemc Elders, Knowledge Keepers and Scholars whose diligent work has informed and inspired this project. Most of the information that I researched about my home has come from the extensive anthology *Secwépemc people, land, and laws: Yerí7 re stsq'ey's-kucw*, by Marianne and Robert Ignace of Simon Fraser University. Their book is a stunning, informative and caring exploration of the Nation's history, laws and relationships. I intend to continue to work with the stories and teachings that have been shared to me to be *in a good way* with the Nation whose lands and waters I call home. For more information on the Secwepemc, see: Ignace, Marianne, and Ronald E. Ignace. *Secwépemc people, land, and laws: Yerí7 re stsq'ey's-kucw*. Vol. 90. McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 2017.

completing their journeys, and starting the cycle again. When they finally reached *Secwepemcúl̓ecw*, the rivers would be red, teeming with Sockeye, all bunched together, tired from a long journey home. Sometimes, it felt like there were so many Sockeye that you could run across them, like a bridge over the river. My father is a marine biologist by education and a science teacher by profession (30 years and counting), and every year we would go and participate in an "egg take" at the Kingfisher Interpretive Society, which was a salmon hatchery along the nearby Shuswap River, which runs through Splatsin territory. Dad would raiseChinook or Sockeye salmonids in a tank in his classroom, and when they reached fry stage we would drive out to the river and release them. I think it was his way of ensuring that we did our part to support the Salmon. The egg take was an annual event, held on Thanksgiving weekend each year. You would always see the same people, returning, as the salmon did. Through rain, or snow, cold and warm, the community would come together and support the river and the salmon. The leader of the society was Neil Brookes, a legendary character and long-time outdoors enthusiast. Neil took great pride in educating the public about salmon lifecycles – he was a staple in science classrooms all over the area for as long as anyone could remember. My dad started inviting him to speak to his class sometime in the early 1990s, and he would do so until his passing. "*When I had first met him, Neil said that the Kingfisher Chinook Run was a success story of locals working with First Nations to restore the Salmon populations in the Shuswap River.*" Dad said, when I asked him what brought him to start working with Neil all those years ago.

"When I first started going to the egg take, I knew very little about the Salmon or local community who had come together and worked so hard to care for them. Neil told me about how the Salmon help to bring back Nitrogen to the forests. They helped to feed families. The helped to feed the bears, who dragged the carcasses up from the river and left the remains in the forest.

They fed the trees, the plants, the ground. They fed the land. It means that Salmon populations are cyclic in nature - their journey is usually a four-year path through the Shuswap, the Thompson, the Fraser and then to the Pacific Ocean and back. I have lived in this area for most of my life, and my learning about the Chinook Salmon, the Secwepemc Nation and the Splatsin has taken at least 30 years. It's ongoing. For more than 30 years, Neil was an educator of students and people of all ages. Neil would put Chinook eggs in the hands of young people and say, "These eggs are the life of the river, they are the future." If you were lucky, Neil would put a freshly beating Chinook heart in your hand and say, "This heart will keep beating for minutes". He paused for a second, ruminating on his story, and then spoke.

"Yes, the Chinook keeps giving life to the river, even after its death."

And so, it would go on. Every fall the Salmon would return, and every fall we would go to the egg take and then release them into the river. We would visit Adams River, too. We have a property further along the lake's shores, on a different arm. One fall, I noticed a change as I visited the park. It was no longer called "Adams River' – the sign now read "Tsutwecw". At the time, this confused me. Why would they change the name? How was 'Adams' going to feel about this? Later, I would learn that the name change was not a 'change'. *Tsutwecw* had always been its true name. For the Secwepemc Nation, *Tsutwecw* was a sacred place, the site of seasonal villages and the point of connection for their kin, the Sockeye people.[12]

With this story in mind, I wish to explain a decision I have made with this thesis. Wherever I can do so, the places that are discussed will be called by their true names, as opposed to their colonial ones. This decision is multifold – first, it is a gesture of respect to the Nations who have held relationships there since time immemorial. Equally, it is out of respect for the

[12] Ignace, Marianne, and Ronald E. Ignace. *Secwépemc people, land, and laws: Yerí7 re stsq'ey's-kucw*. Vol. 90. McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 2017.

Land and these places themselves. Calling them by their true names represents a commitment to listening – to the stories of a place and its people. Too often, places have had their voices taken away from them, preventing their real lessons from being shared or communicated meaningfully, when intended. This exercise is both an act of decolonization and reconstruction. It is a recognition of my positionality in this work, equally. Thus, I wish to acknowledge that I am not a fluent speaker of many of the languages I will address in these place names. I have chosen to include these names as an act of solidarity, and a commitment to the practice of being *in a good way*. Equally, an essential aspect of being *in a good way* means introducing and situating oneself, and thus, I wish to take the opportunity to do so here.

On Positionality

I approach this work with both care and consideration of the complex realities of my positionality in this work, namely my position as a graduate student, my identity as a settler-Canadian citizen, and my identity as an Irish citizen. I was born in Salmon Arm, which is in *Secwépemcúl̓ecw*, the traditional territory of the Secwépemc Nation. I am immensely grateful to call *Secwépemcúl̓ecw* home and give thanks to the Secwépemc Nation for being its guardians since time immemorial. This work is merely the beginning of my journey in exploring what it means to be *in a good way* both here and elsewhere. *Kukwstsétsemc*.[13]

[13] The Secwépemctsín expression for "I thank you all". I was probably first taught a Secwépemc expression of gratitude ("Kukstemc") when I was in elementary school. On occasion, Secwépemc Elders would come to our school and give group lessons. We would also take field trips to various Secwépemc cultural program centres. In the summer of 2023, a colleague of mine at the University of Victoria was gracious enough to share some Secwépemctsín expressions and words with me and introduced me to this expression of gratitude. I had done a field day of work in Secwépemcúl̓ ecw that spring where I travelled around and visited some of the Secwépemc Landmarks, all while doing my best to learn their traditional names. There is an incredible project currently underway in Secwepemcúl̓ ecw wherein the Secwépemc Nation is partnering with the Shuswap Trail Alliance to construct a series of art pieces that are to be featured at specific Secwepemc cultural sites. Each "Landmark" includes a geotag and infographic that gives its Secwépemctsín name and some stories shared by Secwepemc Elders and Knowledge Keepers. Projects like these have been an incredible resource to me and it is with this effort in mind that I wish to acknowledge some of the place names. For more information on the project, see: https://shuswaptrails.com/points/

As a graduate student at the University of Victoria, I also wish to acknowledge with respect the lək̓ʷəŋən peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Songhees, Esquimalt, W̱SÁNEĆ, Pacheedaht and Ditidaht peoples, on whose territories I have been an uninvited visitor for the past four years. It is on the territories of the Pacheedaht and Ditidaht that I have spent much of my time outside of the university, namely along the stretches of the southwest coast of the Island, searching for waves and moments of awe. As a point of foundation, it is ʔay̓ šqʷeləqʷən, a lək̓ʷəŋən teaching that best encapsulates my commitment in this work.[14] Meaning "good heart, good mind", ʔay̓ šqʷeləqʷən encourages me to consider my *emotions*, my *intentions,* and my *purpose* in sharing my voice in this work.

My maternal family is a mix of multi-generational Canadian settlers, with some relations being in the Canadian West since the early 1800s. My paternal family are Irish immigrants, having left Ireland in 1967 at the height of an economic downturn. It is through my paternal side that I am an Irish citizen. I have visited *Eire* several times, with my most recent time being a longer-term stay in *Glas Naíon*, *Contae Baile Átha Cliath*, an inner-city neighbourhood where some of my family now lives. Originally, both sides of my Irish ancestry are from the southwestern region of the island, in *Contae Luimneach*, in the villages of *Cromadh* and *tÁth Leacach*. I have retained deep connections with my family, ancestry, culture, and identity in *Eire*. It is with the interplay between these two identities that I have drawn inspiration for this thesis project and work.

[14] ʔay̓ šqʷeləqʷən was communicated to me in the summer of 2023. I was living and working at the University of Victoria and completing coursework for my master's degree. It was during a lecture given by UVic Professor and Nuu-Chah-Nulth Knowledge Keeper Dr. Dawn Smith, sharing stories of her journeys in education and her practice of "storywork". ʔay̓ šqʷeləqʷən is also featured at the door of the University of Victoria First People's House. I had several classes there, and each morning I would take a few seconds to read and take in the sign at the door. But more on that later.

This positionality statement hopes to serve as an explanation for my decision to conduct this thesis research. As a settler-Canadian working in this field, I recognize that my positionality as an outsider has implications for my participation in this work. My intention here is to conduct research that demonstrates the lessons I have learned in the past two years of graduate education and in the work I have done. Through these teachings, I have come to recognize the importance that positionality and voice play in providing meaning to this project. I do not identify as Indigenous, and I am not a citizen of the Choctaw Nation. I am a citizen of *Eire* and a citizen of Canada. I hope that this work can demonstrate a means of building *good* relations – both between Nations, within myself, and others. I wish to use my positionality as a voice for positive change in this work. I recognize that my position as a graduate student gives me access to resources and networks that may not be otherwise available to the Indigenous Nations I am working with. I will work to ensure that my research supports the self-determination efforts of these Nations. Through my last few years of graduate education, I have learned about the powerful ways that storytelling can communicate legal orders, governance, and worldviews and affirm self-determination efforts. *Storywork*, as both a narrative element and practice, effectively describes a variety of teachings, knowledge and wisdom, all while expressing them through universal themes of love, connection, spirituality and care.

Methodology and Structure

This thesis will operate on a *storywork*-based approach (a contemporary to *narrative inquiry*), with a focus on the historical relationship between the Irish and the Choctaw Nation as inspiration for the practice of being *in a good way*. This method will be used and applied to this topic for better-informing individual, group, and collective efforts in equitable, *good* relationship building between Nations. This research method is qualitative and serves as a means of navigating this research through a storytelling format. The selection of this method is a result of

both the author's interest in creating a thesis that is more creative in nature, as well as a reflection of the subject matter itself. Given that this thesis aims to work with concepts that reflect various Indigenous methodologies and ways of knowing, being and doing, it must contain research methods that are grounded in storytelling practice.

Narrative Inquiry, as a methodology, centers on the exploration and interpretation of stories and experiences to understand the complexities of individual and group's lives.[15] In employing this methodology, a researcher can uncover the underlying themes, emotions and cultural influences that are associated with the story that is being studied.[16] Through this work, I seek to weave together the voices of a variety of perspectives (namely, both Choctaw and Irish) to discuss the focal point of this research (the Choctaw–Irish *gift-reciprocity relationship*). Given my topic, and in respect of my intentions with this work, I have decided to adopt an Indigenous-created contemporary to *narrative inquiry* for my research methodology, which is called *storywork*.[17] My decision to employ *storywork* as my research methodology is multifold – it is equally reliant on oral histories, stories and teachings for research sources, emphasizes the contributory role of relationship building, and grounds itself in the necessary flux that the interconnected world works with, by design.[18] At the outset of each chapter, I will share personal anecdotes and reflections that support me in situating myself within this work as a means of invoking the decolonizing practice of *writing home*.[19]. In respect to being *in a good way*, I wish

[15] Connelly, F. Michael, and D. Jean Clandinin. "Narrative inquiry." In Handbook of complementary methods in education research, pp. 477-487. Routledge, 2012.
[16] *Ibid*
[17] For more information on *storywork*, see: Archibald, Jo-Ann. "An indigenous storywork methodology." *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research: Perspectives, methodologies, examples, and issues* (2008): 371-393, Also: Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing research: Indigenous storywork as methodology*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019.
[18] Archibald, Jo-Ann. "An indigenous storywork methodology." *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research: Perspectives, methodologies, examples, and issues* (2008): 371-393
[19] I discuss *writing home* in Chapter 5: Actions for being *in a good way*. For further information on *writing home* see: Asher, Nina. "Writing home/decolonizing text (s)." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 30,

to acknowledge and prioritize my consideration of the implications for my conducting this research. Given that it is expected to cover interactions both by and with Indigenous Nations, it is important that this research respect and work with the OCAP® Principles for Data Governance,[20] as well as other research design principles and laws.[21] This research project has not included personal interviews or commentary by research partners – largely, it has been formatted through secondary source review and analysis.

This thesis will be divided into 5 Chapters, with the first being an Introduction, the second being a historical overview, the third and fourth being conceptual, and the final being a practical application chapter. Each principal chapter will be connected to a central theme, or teaching, as contributory elements of the *gift-reciprocity relationship*. The practical application Chapter will expand upon these elements by discussing how this form of *relationality* may perpetuate the practice of being *in a good way*, and the potential that it holds for one's own process of *journeying*. Utilizing *storywork* methodology, I look at how the individual and collective experiences of both the Irish and the Choctaw Nation since the *gift*-giving exemplifies a *gift-reciprocity relationship*. The historical (second) Chapter, "The Trail", serves as a discussion on the historical context that led to the Choctaw sending a *gift* of solidarity to the Irish during *an Gorta Mór*. First, I introduce the colonial project's influences and formation for both Nations. I begin by reviewing a history of the Choctaw Nation's resistance against the Spanish through the 1500s, their allegiances with neighbouring Nations, and the circumstances that led to the "Trail of Tears" – a mass forced displacement and cultural assimilation conducted by the

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no. 1 (2009): 1-13.; Wilson, Michael D. *Writing home: Indigenous narratives of resistance*. American Indian Studies, 2008.

[20] For more on the OCAP® Principles for Data Governance see: https://fnigc.ca/ocap-training/

[21] Schnarch, Brian. "Ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP) or self-determination applied to research: A critical analysis of contemporary First Nations research and some options for First Nations communities." International Journal of Indigenous Health 1, no. 1 (2004): 80-95.

United States starting in 1830.[22] Concurrently, I discuss the colonial project in an Irish context – including the cultural context of the Irish people over the course of England's imposition of a series of restrictive laws ('The Penal Laws') that worked to assimilate the Irish culture, restrict Irish language education, and impose a land tenement system that would expunge many Irish Catholics to a desolate corner of the island.[23] These policies would lay the foundation for a devastating famine that would sweep across the European trade routes in the 1840s, and result in mass-scale casualties and emigrations in Ireland.[24]

For the third Chapter, "Seeing all our relations as *gifts*", I discuss *gifting* and its social influence on diplomatic relations. I support this discussion with Robin Wall Kimmerer's concepts on approaches to *gift* relations between human beings and plants, wherein one learns to see their relations themselves as *gifts.*[25] Next, I introduce the Choctaw *gift* of solidarity in 1847, including an explanation of the circumstances that resulted in their decision to support the Irish. I then explore the various perceptions of the intentions of the Choctaw's *gift*, with support from Padraig Kirwan and LeAnne Howe's collaborative research on the Choctaw-Irish narrative.[26] From this discussion, I approach the means of seeing *all our relations* as *gifts*. The fourth Chapter, "Reciprocating the *gift*", will begin by discussing *reciprocity* as a contributor to *gift-reciprocity relations*. I survey the subsequent interactions between the Irish and the Choctaw

[22] Akers, Donna L. *Living in the land of death: The Choctaw Nation, 1830-1860*. MSU Press, 2004.; Coates, Julia. *Trail of tears*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2014.; Davis, Ethan. "An administrative trail of tears: Indian Removal." *American Journal of Legal History* 50, no. 1 (2010): 49-100.
[23] Morrissey, John. "Contours of colonialism: Gaelic Ireland and the early colonial subject." *Irish Geography* 37, no. 1 (2004): 88-102.
[24] Kinealy, Christine. *Charity and the Great Hunger in Ireland: the kindness of strangers*. A&C Black, 2013.
[25] Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed editions, 2013.
[26] It goes without saying that this thesis would not exist without the support of the incredible collaborative project that is *Famine Pots.* Written as a joint initiative between Choctaw and Irish voices, it presents a detailed perspective on the Choctaw's aid and the subsequent impacts for the two Nations. It was spearheaded by Padraig Kirwan (a lecturer and researcher at Goldsmith's University of London) and LeAnne Howe (Choctaw Scholar and Storyteller, Professor at the University of Georgia). For more on *Famine Pots* see: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.14321/j.ctv128fqfb

Nation through the formation of the Irish Republic, in addition to an exploration of the legacy of the gift and how it would serve as a foundation for a *reciprocal* diplomatic relationship between the two Nations. The latest installment of these relations occurred in 2021, when an Irish-led GoFundMe acted in reciprocity and sent aid to support Choctaw and Navajo communities who were experience extreme hardships from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The fifth, and final Chapter will then look to how the *gift-reciprocity relationship* is informative to being *in a good way*. I begin by introducing *renewal*, as an opportunity and action for maintaining *good* relations. Next, I look to how *gratitude* can play in supporting processes of decolonization and reconstruction in relationship building. These processes are only effective when *heard* or understood properly. As such, I discuss *story listening* as an additional, essential, and contributory element of the *gift-reciprocity relationship*. Then, I build on the discussions of the previous chapters by demonstrating some of my actions for being *in a good way*, through the decolonial process of *writing home*. As I hope to demonstrate, being *in a good way* is accessible to anyone - this thesis project represents a snapshot into my own journeying to be *in a good way*. This exploration and commitment to action is not over – it is an ongoing process, and commitment to the self and others, to see the world *relationally*. As I conclude, I offer an expression of *gratitude*, for all that has been, and all that is to come.

Chapter 2: On the Trail

"Certain songs and stories you know because you are part of them. They are old within your blood, and you feel them there."

- Waylon Gary White Deer in *Touched by Thunder*.

Luimneach

My grandfather was sitting in his old purple sofa chair, his glasses hanging at the bridge of his nose, his eyes swimming in the pages of the novel in his calloused hands. It was a school day and I had driven over to visit and share the news of the week, as I always did then. As I still do. That afternoon I had come charged with a mission of sorts, though. It was my 10th grade year and we had been studying Irish literature. Our teacher, a younger man from *Tír Eoghain*[27], had taken great pride in sharing with us a few of his favourite poems, songs and films about his country. Knowing relatively little about my father's country of origin, I remember being excited to ask my teacher about our county, *Luimneach*[28], and a bit more about the Island of which I knew so little. I was slightly startled, however, when his lessons told of darkness that I had never heard of – of an island plagued by sickness, death and hunger, all at the hands of an invading power. The founders of the country we now live in.

I went to my grandfather that day to ask him some questions that I continue to try and find the answers to. They've changed, of course. They have been refined, evolved, and diverted as my relationships have grown. But at their core, they remain the same. My question, in simplest terms, was "Who are we?". I knew that my grandparents had emigrated from Ireland. We had already had several close family members come and visit us on occasion over the years. So, my

[27] *Tír Eoghain* is a border county in the western corner of Northern Ireland. In the fall of 2022, my friend and I visited the county while searching the northwest coast of *Eire* for surf.
[28] Located in the west of *Eire*, *Luimneach* is what we would consider our 'home' county, with most of our relations still located there.

knowledge of the place was mainly concentrated on certain people, as opposed to much history. What were these stories of "famine" and "oppression" and civil war?

They were dark times; he would tell me. The result of centuries of oppression and occupation by the British, religious conflicts and eventually, the formation of an independent republic. But the Nation did not form without cost – so many were lost to death, hunger, and displacement. Many left and never returned. Some of our distant cousins did, leaving for the United States. Like so many others, many of them found themselves surrounded by just as much discrimination as in their homeland. It was the result of a Great Famine, a years-long era of suffering that would be the final straw for so many Irish of the time. Some found their way off the island on large, disease-ridden ships bound for the Americas and Australia. Colloquially, they were known as coffin ships. Later, I would learn the given name of this period. Even now, the traumas from its impacts echo across the Irish people. Its name, *an Gorta Mór,* means "the great famine". Read aloud, the name alone seems to make the lights darken, the air turn cold, a feeling of despair set in.

My eventual exposure to the famine and its devastation would come atop a mountain bordering the edges of our family's land in *Donoman*, *Co. Luimneach*. A rolling hill amongst a sea of fields, *Knockfierna* evokes a sense of grandeur, though its size pales in comparison to even the smallest mountain in Canada. The path to the top winds along an old farm road, up and over to a famine monument, erected in "memory of all those who suffered and died in this district during the great famine". Along the way, a series of "famine homes" lay dormant. Famine homes are simply abandoned homesteads, once belonging to itinerant farmers and everyday people in hard-hit regions of the countryside. To step inside one is to truly understand the aura of emotion they hold.

The cabin was collapsing on itself, its flat rock walls crumbling and overrun with moss. For the most part, the roof was also gone, save for a few rotting branches that had fallen into the main room. The once dirt and stone floor was grown in now, the grass working like the land's fingers, palming the cabin's remains away from the visual world. A weight seemed to wash over my shoulders. The walls of the cabin seemed to ache, the home they once held was now nothing but a distant memory. This entire family had been lost here; we were told. As so many others did, each one along this road even. The mountain seemed to bear that weight, especially when we reached the top. Looking out across the fields, it didn't take long to imagine the scenes here, no less than a century and a half earlier. To hear the wails of infants, laying in the arms of their starving mothers, whose last ounces of energy were being used to whisper for help as they were consumed by the soil below them. We were cautious, and reflective as we walked that road. We all seemed to understand the responsibility we held to those who had been lost there. *an Gorta Mór*'s devastation is an incomprehensible event in the minds of the Irish. Reminders of its impacts can be found anywhere, from a small monument in Luimneach to a park in New York City. [29]And what for those who cried out for help, lost in a sea of despair? Their calls would be answered by a benevolent voice from an ocean away.

Introduction

In this chapter, I provide context for the Choctaw Nation's *gift* to the Irish, and how it provided a foundation for their *gift-reciprocity relationship*. In 1847, at the height of *an Gorta Mór*, word was received of an overseas donation that was intended to support Irish women and children to recover from the devastating impacts of the famine. Across the Atlantic, a meeting had taken place, organized by several chiefs of the Choctaw Nation, an Indigenous Nation whose

[29] There is an incredible famine monument in New York City's Battery Park (the Irish Hunger Memorial). For more on the monument see: https://bpca.ny.gov/place/irish-hunger-memorial/

traditional territory had been in Mississippi but had recently been relocated to "Indian Territory" under the U.S. government's *Indian Removal* Act of 1830. Upon hearing of the atrocities overseas, they decided to pull together a package of recovery funds and send it to the starving Irish. Their gift would not only provide much-needed support in a time of immense need but also lay the foundation for a reciprocal diplomatic relationship that exists to this day. In this chapter, I introduce the historical context for the Choctaw's *gift*-giving and the formation of their diplomatic relationship with the Irish. I begin by discussing the Choctaw's early Nation-to-Nation relations, including those with neighbouring tribes and some of the early settler Nations. Next, I discuss the *Indian Removal* Act and the subsequent displacement of the Choctaw from their traditional homeland in Mississippi, including their path along the Trail of Tears to "Indian Territory", in the modern state of Oklahoma. I then contrast the Choctaw's colonial experience with that of the Irish, starting with the banishment of the Catholic Irish to Connaught in the 16th century, and leading up to the Penal Laws and the English Occupation. Then, I discuss the Great Famine, including the conditions that permitted its occurrence and the subsequent exodus that occurred over the course of its impact. As I conclude, I reflect upon the historical circumstance that supported the formation of the relationship between the two Nations.

Among Neighbours and Invaders: Genesis, Origins and Relationships

The Choctaw Nation trace their ancestral Land back to a place that overlaps multiple states in the now-Southeastern United States.[30] Just as their existence has been characterized by a series of transformative events, their response (both collectively and individually) to such events is deeply reflective of the worldview, governance, and legal orders of their Nation. In the words of many leaders and citizens, to be Choctaw is to endure, like an eternal flame burning in the

[30] Akers, Donna L. "Removing the heart of the Choctaw people: Indian removal from a native perspective." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 23, no. 3 (1999).; Lambert, Valerie. *Choctaw Nation: a story of American Indian resurgence*. U of Nebraska Press, 2007.

wind.[31] Their genesis as a Nation is well documented through a rich oral history, passed down the generations over thousands of years. The Choctaw's origin story has been discussed by several Choctaw Scholars, including Valerie Lambert and Donna Akers. In *Choctaw Nation: A Story of American Resurgence,* Lambert identifies two different stories as being the principal origin tales of both the Choctaw and the Chickasaw, respectively.[32] The first tale chronicles the Choctaw's journey from a distant western country, led by a sacred pole called *Fabussa*.[33] Some variations of the story include *Fabussa* guiding two brothers (Chahta and Chikasa), each the progenitor of the Chocktaw and Chickasaw respectively, to the territories, while some only mention Chahta.[34] Another variation tells of the Choctaws emerging from the land in the territory, born by the "red" soil.[35] In her chapter "A Brief History of the Choctaw People to 1817", Donna Akers asserts the variation whereby a single leader alone leads the Choctaw to their homeland.[36] Her variation includes a speech by the Leader, who is said to have announced;

"We are now in the land of tall trees and running waters, of fruit, of game of many kinds and fish and fowl, which was spoken of by our good chief, who is missing, in the far-off country towards the setting sun. His words have come to pass. Our journey is at an end, and we shall grow to be a nation of happy people in this fruitful land."[37]

In a different variation, Lambert tells of *Fabussa* being the leader, encouraging the brothers to move eastwards toward the sacred territory, stating:

[31] Akers, Donna L. "Removing the heart of the Choctaw people: Indian removal from a native perspective." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 23, no. 3 (1999); Akers, Donna L. *Living in the land of death: The Choctaw Nation, 1830-1860*. MSU Press, 2004.
[32] Lambert, Valerie. *Choctaw Nation: a story of American Indian resurgence*. U of Nebraska Press, 2007.
[33] Ibid
[34] Ibid
[35] Akers, Donna L. *Culture and customs of the Choctaw Indians*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2013.
[36] Akers, Donna L. *Living in the land of death: The Choctaw Nation, 1830-1860*. MSU Press, 2004.
[37] Ibid

"*Fabussa told the brothers […] to round up our people and journey east. Each night of our migration, before we camped we planted fabussa upright in the earth. For many mornings, we awoke to find her leaning to the east, telling us that our walk was not over. The journey was long and hard. We had insisted that our ancestors not be left behind, and the bundles we had made to carry the bones of our dead were very heavy. One night, weary from our travels, we planted fabussa atop a mound. When we awoke, we found her still upright, telling us that we had reached our new home. The mound was Nanih Waiya[38], a mound in present-day Mississippi that each year our tribe sends the elders to visit. Chahta set out one way from the top of the mound; Chikasa, another. This is how the Choctaw and Chickasaw tribes came to be*."[39]

While the stories offer differing interpretations of the Nation's exact origin, their conclusion is very much the same – that the Choctaw came to reach *Nanih Waiya*, and that *Nanih Waiya* is the source of their Nationhood, their existence as a people, and the interconnected web of relations they hold.[40] Being their relative anchor to all things, *Nanih Waiya*'s existence as a place of sacred connection and governance also confers with it an intricate meaning – it is a *gift* given in care to the Choctaw as a Nation.[41] This sacred *gift* would carry forward across generations and continues to do so to this day. For Akers, this interpretation of "gift" has held more than just a consideration for the Choctaw's own relation to the territory – it has been the

[38] Meaning "leaning hill or great mound" in Choctaw, *Nanih Waiya* is a large earthen mound located in present-day southern Mississippi. As the point of origin of the Choctaw, it is a sacred site. Many ceremonies continue to be held there to this day. Some believe that a sacred fire burns there in honour of all Choctaw, a representation of their enduring power and existence as a Nation. For more information see: Akers, Donna L. "Removing the Heart of the Choctaw People." *The American Indian: Past and Present* (2008): 127-140.
[39] Lambert, Valerie. *Choctaw Nation: a story of American Indian resurgence*. U of Nebraska Press, 2007.
[40] Akers, Donna L. *Culture and customs of the Choctaw Indians*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2013.; Lambert, Valerie. *Choctaw Nation: a story of American Indian resurgence*. U of Nebraska Press, 2007.; O'Brien, Greg, ed. *Pre-removal Choctaw history: Exploring new paths*. Vol. 255. University of Oklahoma Press, 2008.
[41] Akers, Donna L. "Removing the heart of the Choctaw people: Indian removal from a native perspective." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 23, no. 3 (1999).; Bacon, Willard Keith. "Legends of Nanih Waiya." *Nanih Waiya* 1, no. 1 (1973): 2-3. ; Lewis, Jason Brightstar. "Home in the Choctaw Diaspora: Survival and Remembrance Away from Nanih Waiya." PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2011.

foundation of much of their ongoing practice with relationship building among other beings.[42] So close is the Choctaw's *gift* relationship to *Nanih Waiya* that she notes "[the Choctaw] were as the herbs of the forest, roots buried deep into the earth where they were planted".[43] This deep connection and relationship to understandings of *gift* as a foundational element of Choctaw ways of knowing, being and doing is particularly important for this project, and will be further explored in Chapter 3.

As previously stated, the Choctaw's origin and relation to their neighbours, the Chickasaw, is at times presented as being so closely connected that it is a relationship of kin. The relationship between the two Nations, like any 'sibling', beholds a multiplicity of emotions and moments of both proximity and distance.[44] Over the late 17th century, Choctaw communities were involved in various examples of intertribal trade and diplomacy with neighbouring Nations.[45] Their diplomacy with the Chickasaw would strain however, when the Chickasaw established an allegiance with the invading English. The Choctaws, in turn, would forge an alliance with the French in 1699, going so far as to engage in war efforts against their enemies well through the 1700s.[46] The French sought the Choctaw's alliance to bolster their effort in the fir trade, as well as for the negotiation of land settlement claims.[47] For Lambert, this allegiance was understood as uneasy and problematic at the best of times.[48] Despite the French being their

[42] Akers, Donna L. "Removing the heart of the Choctaw people: Indian removal from a native perspective." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 23, no. 3 (1999).
[43] Akers, Donna L. *Living in the land of death: The Choctaw Nation, 1830-1860*. MSU Press, 2004.
[44] Champagne, Duane. Social order and political change: constitutional governments among the Cherokee, the Choctaw, the Chickasaw, and the Creek. Stanford University Press, 1992.
[45] Cain, Kati. "Ittibaapishi'at Ittachapa: Chickasaw and Choctaw Relations in Indian Territory, 1839-1856." (2022).; Champagne, Duane. *Social order and political change: constitutional governments among the Cherokee, the Choctaw, the Chickasaw, and the Creek*. Stanford University Press, 1992.; Lambert, Valerie. *Choctaw Nation: a story of American Indian resurgence*. U of Nebraska Press, 2007.
[46] Lambert, Valerie. "The Journey has been Long and Hard" in *Choctaw Nation: a story of American Indian resurgence*. U of Nebraska Press, 2007. 22.
[47] Ibid
[48] Ibid

primary allies, some Choctaw groups were also believed to have partnered with the English and the Spanish sparingly.[49] To earn their partnership, Choctaw leaders were often recipients of *gifts* at the hands of the French including rifles, war paint and European-made blankets.[50] Nonetheless, it was the Nation's primary focus to engage at the village, region or kinship level for maintaining unity.[51]

Political organization and governance of the Choctaw pre-removal is described in various structures by Choctaw Scholars and Settler academics alike. While there is several theories on the design of their governance system at this time, many agree that the arrival of the Europeans contributed to the forming of the Choctaw Confederacy circa 1708.[52] Deemed a confederacy for its structure, the Nation was organized into three districts: the *Okla Falaya*, the *Okla Tannap,* and the *Okla Hannali*.[53] Within the confederacy, each district would have a chief and council.[54] The district chief and council would be composed of leaders from matrilineal clan structures called *iksas*[55]*,* while a national council made up of district chiefs and councillors was also organized for specific meetings.[56] The Choctaw confederacy would continue as the primary governance structure for the Nation as European powers would continue to encroach upon their territory, with the formation of the American country not far behind them. The fur trade's impacts had exasperated many of the Choctaw's food sources, and many communities decided to take

[49] Ibid
[50] O'Brien, Greg. *Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age, 1750-1830*. U of Nebraska Press, 2005.
[51] Ibid
[52] O'Brien, Greg, ed. *Pre-removal Choctaw history: Exploring new paths*. Vol. 255. University of Oklahoma Press, 2008.
[53] Ibid; O'Brien, Greg. *Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age, 1750-1830*. U of Nebraska Press, 2005.
[54] Ibid
[55] Scholarship on pre-removal Choctaw governance and organization is extensive and contains various interpretations by both European accounts and contemporary Choctaw and Settler voices. For the purpose of this project's focus on specific events and themes, Choctaw governance is not extensively analyzed or explored. For further reading on Choctaw governance and societal organization, see: Charlemagne 1992, Galloway, Akers, Lambert, O'Brien 2002.
[56] Lambert, Valerie. "The Journey has been Long and Hard" in *Choctaw Nation: a story of American Indian resurgence*. U of Nebraska Press, 2007. 24.

advantage of credit offerings by Spanish, and later American hands.[57] Lambert identifies this credit acquisition as being a period where the tribe would begin to realize the incoming danger of the American expansion.[58] With the American Revolution, the Choctaw anticipated their interactions to be like the relationship they had held with the French.[59] The reality, however, was far from the same. As Akers notes, "the [Americans] not only assumed a cultural and an economic superiority but also expounded a belief in their own destiny and right to native lands".[60] This assumption of land ownership and hierarchy, while decidedly contiguous to the colonial project, is also reflected in the United States' relationships with the Choctaw Nation from the outset. Though their initial interactions would include an agreement with the U.S. on the assertion of Choctaw sovereignty and governance, this would not always be the case by any means.

From Relocation to Domination: The Indian Removal Act

Initial relations between the newly-formed United States and the Choctaw were established on what Akers calls a "political hegemony".[61] The U.S. government embraced a different approach to Choctaw relations that previous European Nations – they operated under the assumption of a diminished sovereignty by the Choctaw, and an intention of exploiting it by whatever means necessary.[62] For Rand, the main avenue that this exploitation was driven through was the diminution of land status.[63] As the U.S. government power increased, assumption would become coupled with "pre-emption".[64] Therein, American hands beheld exclusive rights to

[57] Ibid
[58] Ibid
[59] Akers, Donna L. "A Brief History of the Choctaw People to 1817" in *Living in the land of death: The Choctaw Nation, 1830-1860*. MSU Press, 2004. At 11.
[60] Ibid
[61] Ibid
[62] Ibid
[63] Thompson Rand, Jackie. "Reconciliation" in *Famine Pots: The Choctaw–Irish Gift Exchange, 1847–Present*. Howe, LeAnne, and Padraig Kirwan, eds. MSU Press, 2020. At 167.
[64] Akers, Donna L. "A Brief History of the Choctaw People to 1817". 11.

purchase any Indigenous land that was being offered to sell. In combination with perceptions of diminished sovereignty, pre-emption would lay the foundation for a series of Supreme Court rulings that encased the unequal and unequitable relationship in state and federal law.[65] Federal leaders and officials were also keen in driving the unequal relationship into stone. Among the early proponents of land diminution was Andrew Jackson, future President and founding father. Many agree that Jefferson's public and private motivations for Native relations were largely opposing in nature.[66] While he has often been publicly quoted as supporting "peaceful" relations between Indigenous Nations and Americans throughout formation, his personal communications have shown a more thorough commitment to the confinement of Indigenous peoples to small plots of land, facilitating government control.[67] This was no more evident than in his support of land cessation. He widely encouraged Indigenous people to accrue massive debts from U.S. trading posts – when the debts were unpaid, portions of native land were claimed as collateral.[68] In this Akers notes that "[indebtedness] was used as a snare to catch unsuspecting native peoples in a web of market relations alien to their worldview".[69] Land acquisition and cessation would not be the entirety of the government's political targets, however.

In describing her perception of Andrew Jackson's underlying intentions for native relations, Akers offers that he "saw the U.S. colonization of North America metaphorically as an

[65] Ibid.; O'Brien, Greg. *Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age, 1750-1830*. U of Nebraska Press, 2005.
[66] Carson, James Taylor. *Searching for the bright path: the Mississippi Choctaws from prehistory to removal*. U of Nebraska Press, 2003.; Lambert, Valerie. *Choctaw Nation: a story of American Indian resurgence*. U of Nebraska Press, 2007.
[67] Akers, Donna L. "Removing the heart of the Choctaw people: Indian removal from a native perspective." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 23, no. 3 (1999).; Carson, James Taylor. *Searching for the bright path: the Mississippi Choctaws from prehistory to removal*. U of Nebraska Press, 2003.; Thompson Rand, Jackie. "Reconciliation" in *Famine Pots: The Choctaw–Irish Gift Exchange, 1847–Present*. Howe, LeAnne, and Padraig Kirwan, eds. MSU Press, 2020.
[68] Akers, Donna L. "Removing the heart of the Choctaw people: Indian removal from a native perspective." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 23, no. 3 (1999).
[69] Akers, Donna L. "A Brief History of the Choctaw People to 1817". 12.

ocean wave before which the Indian populations should flee".[70] This wave would operate as any ocean wave does – from a point of generation, it would move forward, gaining speed and power before crashing upon the shore with rapid repetition. While the U.S. government's external pressures and assimilative policies would be the major force behind the Choctaw's eventual removal and relocation, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which they would contribute to internal pressures for change, equally. Lambert notes that "Choctaw leaders became convinced that the tribe's survival in the now vastly different political landscape rested not only on the education of their children but also on their adoption of Euro-American political instruments such as a police force, a constitution, and a code of written laws".[71] The Choctaw could feel the waves coming, and were prepared to meet them on equal ground, on their own terms. By the late 1700s, the Choctaw would sign their first independent treaty with the U.S. government. Named the Treaty of Hopewell (1785) for its signing location, the Treaty helped to plant the unequal relationship into law. To Akers, the Treaty "sowed the seeds of conquest in an alien legal process that […] lead to the dispossession of the Choctaw Nation".[72] The Treaty's formal intention was to both establish formal boundaries and support peaceful relations between the U.S. and the signatory Tribes (signatories included the Cherokee, the Choctaw, the Chickasaw, the Creek (Muskogee), the Kussoe and the Catawba).[73] Nonetheless, it included a series of Articles and clauses that were reflective of the oncoming wave of domination and assimilation, including assumptions of American allotment of Choctaw lands, prevention of Choctaw diplomacy with protection from other sovereign Nations, and the precedence of U.S. law over Choctaw law.[74]

[70] Ibid
[71] Lambert, Valerie. *Choctaw Nation: a story of American Indian resurgence*. U of Nebraska Press, 2007.
[72] Akers, Donna L. "Removing the heart of the Choctaw people: Indian removal from a native perspective." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 23, no. 3 (1999).
[73] Ibid
[74] Ibid; Perdue, Theda. "The legacy of Indian removal." *The Journal of Southern History* 78, no. 1 (2012): 3-36.

Treaty agreements of this period would continue to establish the U.S. government's attempted control and domination of Choctaw sovereignty. Despite this, the Choctaw would respond with the creation of their own first written constitution, which affirmed the three-district division into an executive institution.[75] This would include 4-year election cycles for chiefs and a judicial system based in trial judgements.[76] In addition, a legislative body was established, sourced from *iksa* from both district and national chiefs.[77] All the while, the U.S. government would continue to affirm its domination through land cessation and debt accruement by Choctaw farmers. Over the first two decades of the 19th century, some 4.5 million acres of Choctaw land in Mississippi were ceded to the American government, settlers and companies.[78] By 1817, Mississippi was made an American state and land cessations increased. The formation of the new state would support the government's desire to dominate Indigenous culture and land. Federal discussion had turned to a proposed forced "relocation" of the five Indigenous tribes to a new territory further inland, and then-President Jackson personally handled the proposed "relocation" legislative grunt work to ensure the Nations' displacement.[79] By 1830, the Missisipi government exercised its acquired power and passed the Indian Removal Act.[80] While there were small scatters of support for removal, largely based on the establishment of a federally-promised "native state", Tribal consensus is understood to have held that removal was a nail-in-coffin venture.[81] Deemed the most "civilized" of the Nations, the Choctaw were selected as the first

[75] Lambert, Valerie. "The Journey has been Long and Hard" in *Choctaw Nation: a story of American Indian resurgence*. U of Nebraska Press, 2007.
[76] Ibid
[77] Ibid
[78] Ibid
[79] Ibid
[80] Akers, Donna L. "Removing the heart of the Choctaw people: Indian removal from a native perspective." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 23, no. 3 (1999).
[81] Lambert, Valerie. "The Journey has been Long and Hard" in *Choctaw Nation: a story of American Indian resurgence*. U of Nebraska Press, 2007.

Nation for removal. While a counter-treaty that supported relocation on their own terms was signed and delivered by Choctaw officials, it was rejected by the U.S. Senate.[82] By September of 1830, the removal agreement was signed and preparations began for the Choctaw's relocation to "Indian Territory", a 15-million-acre patch of land that is now Oklahoma.[83]

The Trail of Tears

And so began the long march. The relocation would eventually come to be known as the "Trail of Tears" for its genocidal nature.[84] Accounts of its atrocities do not leave much to the imagination – from tales of starvation, exhaustion and extreme weather to horrific violence and tragedy. So severe were the conditions that Lambert notes "some parties were forced to walk thirty miles in waist-deep swamp water, and some endured near-blizzard conditions. Nearly all experienced an inadequate supply of food, blankets, and horses with which to carry the sick, elders, and youth".[85] All too similar is Birchfield's description in *Eating Fire, Tasting Blood*, offering that "[at] other times, barefoot Choctaws were forced to huddle around open fires in freezing temperatures with nothing but a blanket for protection from snowfall as deep as five inches".[86] Disease and death were everywhere. The mass-exodus event would take place over two winter migrations – from 1831-1832 and 1832-1833, in addition to a fall migration in 1833.[87] Over the course of that 3-year period, upwards of 1 in 7 Choctaw would succumb to

[82] Akers, Donna L. "Removing the heart of the Choctaw people: Indian removal from a native perspective." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 23, no. 3 (1999).; Lambert, Valerie. "The Journey has been Long and Hard" in *Choctaw Nation: a story of American Indian resurgence*. U of Nebraska Press, 2007.
[83] Ibid
[84] Ibid; Lambert, Valerie. "The Journey has been Long and Hard" in *Choctaw Nation: a story of American Indian resurgence*. U of Nebraska Press, 2007.; Birchfield, D. L. The Trail of Tears. United States: World Almanac Library, 2003.
[85] Lambert, Valerie. "The Journey has been Long and Hard" in *Choctaw Nation: a story of American Indian resurgence*. U of Nebraska Press, 2007.
[86] Birchfield, D. L. "The Cherokee Nation: a colonial morality play in three acts" in *Eating Fire, Tasting Blood : Breaking the Great Silence of the American Indian Holocaust*. Moore, Marijo Ed. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2006.
[87] Birchfield, D. L. The Trail of Tears. United States: World Almanac Library, 2003.

illness, hunger and injury.[88] Not unlike the trials experienced by the Nation during their march to *Nanih Waiya*, this walk would be plagued by famine, bad weather and hardship. The Trail of Tears has been covered widely by Choctaw knowledge keepers and represents a defining era in the Nation's personal history. The echoes of loss and hunger would carry on, and later influence much of the Nation's sentiment toward hunger and aid. So much so in fact, that LeAnne Howe notes "[starving] is still anathema to the Choctaws, and for good reason".[89] In acknowledging the ongoing pain from the Trail's impacts, Lambert notes: "I have seen tears stream down the cheeks of more than a few of our elders when the subject comes up, as it often does, of this watershed event in Choctaw history".[90] A similar sentiment is evoked by LeAnne Howe in her poem, "Ishka, Mother, Upon Leaving the Choctaw Homelands, 1831":

"*Right here there's a hole of sorrow in the center of my chest*

A puncture

A chasm of muscle

Sinew

Bones"

– LeAnne Howe in *Famine Pots*[91]

The long-lasting impacts of the Trail on the Choctaw remain in a collective memory, a universal acknowledgement of the loss of both the homeland and many ancestors, its deepest horrors bordering on the indescribable. Nonetheless, their arrival in the new "Indian Territory" would

[88] Ibid
[89] Howe, LeAnne. "Ima, Give" in *Famine Pots: The Choctaw–Irish Gift Exchange, 1847–Present*. Howe, LeAnne, and Padraig Kirwan, eds. MSU Press, 2020.
[90] Lambert, Valerie. "The Journey has been Long and Hard" in *Choctaw Nation: a story of American Indian resurgence*. U of Nebraska Press, 2007.
[91] Howe, LeAnne. "Ishka, Mother, Upon Leaving the Choctaw Homelands, 1831" in *Famine Pots: The Choctaw–Irish Gift Exchange, 1847–Present*. Howe, LeAnne, and Padraig Kirwan, eds. MSU Press, 2020.

call for the rebuilding of their Nation. In describing the general Choctaw sentiment of the period, Akers offers that "[they] adjusted to their new circumstances, reshaped identity, and reformulated kinship while maintaining language, values, and beliefs that set them apart as a distinct people".[92] Ever resilient, the Nation would begin the process of reconstruction, including the construction of a cotton and corn farming economy, the drafting of a new written constitution, and the formation of a new government.[93] But what for the cultural connectivity to the great mound and the sacred land? The separation would be marked by a universal effort to reclaim the land in the new territory, maintaining the connection through a *gift* of good spirit and connectivity. When asked about the ways in which the Choctaw endured, Howe offered that "[they] took handfuls of earth from the land around the *Nanih Waiya*, our mother mound in Mississippi, as they began their journey on the Trail of Tears. When we brought our earth, when we brought our people, the names came with us".[94] The enduring spirit of the Nation is much reflected in its relationship to time, perceiving it in a non-linear, orbital-based trajectory, ever in flux.[95] Equally, the adaptability was not only a reflection of the Nation's worldview, but the language that tied them to *Nanih Waiya* and beyond.[96] Finding comfort amidst such devastation was no small feat, and Akers notes that hope was found "in tradition, in spiritual beliefs, and in relationships with kinfolk and friends".[97]

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[92] Akers, Donna L. "A New Life in the Land of Death: Decade of Despair" in *Living in the land of death: The Choctaw Nation, 1830-1860*. MSU Press, 2004.
[93] Ibid
[94] Kirwan, Padraig. "Choctaw tales: An interview with LeAnne Howe." *Women: A Cultural Review* 27, no. 3 (2016): 265-279.
[95] Mould, Tom. *Choctaw Prophecy: A Legacy for the Future*. University of Alabama Press, 2003.
[96] Akers, Donna L. "A New Life in the Land of Death: Decade of Despair" in *Living in the land of death: The Choctaw Nation, 1830-1860*. MSU Press, 2004.
[97] Akers, Donna L. "A New Life in the Land of Death: Decade of Despair" in *Living in the land of death: The Choctaw Nation, 1830-1860*. MSU Press, 2004.; Lambert, Valerie. "The Journey has been Long and Hard" in *Choctaw Nation: a story of American Indian resurgence*. U of Nebraska Press, 2007.

The reformation of the Nation in this new land would remain fresh on the minds of its leadership and citizens. Despite a recent period of suffering and hardship, the subsequent two decades from removal would prove to be a relatively prosperous period for the Choctaw. As more and more Nations would walk the Trail towards the new territory, the Choctaw would find prosperity in the formation of their own economies, government, and education systems.[98] As traders, they would engage with local Nations, settlers, and the U.S. officials.[99] Yet, the memories of the Trail would loom fresh on the minds of the Choctaw. So much so, that when the news came of an impoverished and oppressed Nation suffering a great famine an ocean away, several Choctaw would meet and immediately work to accumulate a recovery fund, going so far as to send some of the little compensation received for removal some decade earlier. This compassionate *gift* would prove to be the foundation of a new, diplomatic, and equitable relationship for the Choctaw, a connection so close that the collective burden of removal would find itself shared by a people across the Atlantic.

Hell, or Connaught

When contemplating the connectivity found between the Choctaw's displacement and the colonial experience of the Irish, it is one particularly resonant inquiry, often referred to as the "most Irish of questions" by Liam Ashe, that encapsulates a starting point.[100] *Cé dhár díobh tú?* meaning "who are you of?" in Irish, quite literally translates to "what land do you belong to?".[101] It is with this context of *land-belonging*, and thus, deep connectivity to place and ways of being,

[98] Wells, Samuel J., and Roseanna Tubby, eds. *After removal: the Choctaw in Mississippi*. Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1986.
[99] Ibid
[100] Ashe, Liam. "Rhémhrá" in *The Art of Place: People and Landscape of County Clare.* King, P. and Jones, A. Eds. Liffey Press, 2022.
[101] I first encountered this edited volume while staying in *the Burren* in the fall of 2023. Renowned as the home of *Eire*'s artists, it lies on the country's west coast, surrounded by great limestone hills and desolate green seas. The people there are incredibly friendly, passionate, and resourceful, having adapted to their surroundings. Many of their ancestors experienced their own removal at the hands of the Crown, some 200 years ago.

knowing and doing, that the foundations of the Choctaw and Irish relationship is best explored. The intersections of the Choctaw's displacement from their sacred territory and *Nanih Waiya* and the Irish from their lands are most evident starting across the period of the mid-17th century. While the Choctaw were encountering foreign traders and military powers from Europe along their frontiers, the Irish were experiencing a century of bloodshed, loss and conquest at the hands of the English. For the Irish, the colonial apparatus with which the English would base their claims was not too dissimilar to that with which the Americans had encroached upon the Choctaw. Pre-English occupation Ireland was plagued by various invaders – from the Normans to the Vikings. By the 11th century, Ireland had already been claimed by the English, with the imposition of an Irish parliament (led by wealthy English and Protestant landlords) that restricted any membership from Gaelic Irishmen.[102] Over the course of several centuries, various uprisings, rebellions and civil wars would occur. The Irish, ever the combative, enduring, and resilient, would not stop until the invading English would part, leaving them and their culture alone. Change for the worse would begin starting around 1535, however, when then-king Henry VII initiated the pacification of the island, inducing its subduction to English rule.[103] Henry VII's motivations for the absorption of Ireland as English territory are widely agreed to be a mix of both military strategy and attempts to control a perceived unruly, savage and listless Catholic society. [104]

While the English colonization project began expanding to the Americas, the Crown initiated a series of policies aimed at changing the population of the contested island. Known as

[102] Kinealy, Christine. *A new history of Ireland*. The History Press, 2008.; Ranelagh, John. *A short history of Ireland*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.
[103] Kramer, Jürgen. *Britain and Ireland: a concise history*. Routledge, 2020.
[104] Ibid

"plantations", the process would operate through a series of land settlements through military and political force.[105] Wealthy English landlords, Protestant Scots and Welsh were given large swathes of land across Ireland, with the intention of changing the cultural makeup of the area.[106] The Irish would be forced from the lands and sent off as tenants under English landowners, or simply be expunged to distant territories. By the mid 1600s, the largest population of catholic Irish, and greatest military threat, was in the kingdom of Ulster, in the northeast. The plantations were not accepted readily by the native Irish, who led a large-scale rebellion in 1641, with the intention of reclaiming the stolen land, as well as acquiring equal rights as members of society.[107] The Crown's response would be the "Act for the Settling of Ireland, 1662", a piece of legislation aimed at laying the final hand in the removal of the Catholic Irish from the region. The Act would see that all former Irish landowners, rebellion leaders, and civilians be forcibly removed from their land and sent west. Famously, it is speculated that the government of the time informed the Irish that they must go "to hell or to Connacht", alluding to the harsh life that awaited them in the West.[108] Removed from the deeply fertile lands in Ulster, many of the Catholic elite Irish would find themselves transplanted to a series of settlements in what are now the counties of *Gaillimh*, *Dhún na nGall* and *an Chláir*. To an extent, this exodus was a form of 'long march' in its own right. British rule aimed to move all the Irish west of the Shannon, ensuring that they would be boxed in by the Ocean on the west side and the river's boundary on

[105] Andrews, John. "Plantation Ireland: a review of settlement history." *A history of settlement in Ireland* (2012): 156-173.; Canny, Nicholas. *Making Ireland British, 1580-1650*. OUP Oxford, 2001.; Kinealy, Christine. *A new history of Ireland*. The History Press, 2008.
[106] Canny, Nicholas. *Making Ireland British, 1580-1650*.; Montaño, John Patrick. *The roots of English colonialism in Ireland*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.
[107] Reilly, Matthew C. "Conquest and Land in Ireland: The Transplantation to Connacht, 1649-1680. John Cunningham. Suffolk, UK: Royal Historical Society Publications/Boydell Press, 2011. 240 pages. ISBN: 978-0861933150." (2013).
[108] Ibid

the east.[109] Despite the exodus, much of the population remained in place, deemed as essential labour for the newfound Protestant ruling class.[110] With a majority population of Catholic Irish remaining under Protestant control, efforts would need to be taken to ensure their domination, in addition to the dissolution of their spiritual foundations.

Na Péindlíthe (the Penal Laws)

By the late 1600s, British rule was in full effect, with most of society being organized into a few groups, including the Catholic Irish (who totalled upwards of 75% of the population), Protestant Irish, Protestant Dissenters, and Old English. [111]Most of the Crown's rule was delivered through *Baile atha Cliath* and London, and regional control was exerted through British nobility. As Connolly notes, "beyond [Dublin] lay a frontier region […] ruled by English lords but largely Irish in language and custom".[112] The Crown, through the (British controlled) Irish parliament would thus make a final push to assert British rule over the Irish with its adoption of Na Péindlíthe (The Penal Laws), a series of controlling legal statutes intended to subdue and control the catholic majority of the land.[113] So severe were the restrictions placed upon the Catholic Irish that they have been explained as a vehicle to "degrade the character and to blast the prosperity of a Nation".[114] Public opinion of the laws amongst the Irish during the period was no less supportive. The renowned Irish politician Edmund Burke once described them

[109] Cunningham, John. "Oliver Cromwell and the 'Cromwellian' settlement of Ireland." *The Historical Journal* 53, no. 4 (2010): 919-937.
[110] Connolly, James. *Labour in Irish history*. Lulu. com, 1971.; Connolly, S. J. *Divided Kingdom Ireland, 1630-1800*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
[111] Ibid
[112] Connolly, S. J. *Divided Kingdom Ireland, 1630-1800*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
[113] McGrath, Charles Ivar. "Securing the Protestant interest: the origins and purpose of the penal laws of 1695." *Irish Historical Studies* 30, no. 117 (1996): 25-46.
[114] Quotations from Edmund Burke, Irish Politician and Nationalist, in: McGrath, Charles Ivar. "Securing the Protestant Interest: The Origins and Purpose of the Penal Laws of 1695." Irish Historical Studies 30, no. 117 (1996): 25-46.

as a means for the "oppression, impoverishment and degradation of a people".[115] The Laws were organized to target specific facets of Irish catholic society – including Education, Land and Religious practice.[116] Among them was *An Act to prevent the further Growth of Popery*, specifically employed to restrict Catholic land ownership and land inheritance. Largely, this facilitated the colonial powers seizure and control of lands taken from Catholic owners who were unable to pay taxes.[117] Throughout her work *To Elude the Design and Intention of the Penal Laws*, Lyons offers a compelling example of how some Catholics would attempt to subvert the Act and retain control of Irish lands.[118] Her findings indicate that it was through collusion with Protestants that many Catholics were able to purchase and retain land (a practice otherwise prevented by the laws).[119] Despite these small incidences of support, it is largely understood that there was a relatively definitive separation, both economically and socially, between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland over this period.[120] While land acquisition and control would be one avenue for English domination, it was both the forceful and gradual decline of the Irish language that would show among the deepest impacts to Irish culture. As the century wore on, Irish language education would cease to hold status in the professional and educational setting.[121] It would, however, remain as a community language, spoken in certain regions of the country, and

[115] Ibid
[116] McGrath, Charles Ivar. "Securing the Protestant Interest: The Origins and Purpose of the Penal Laws of 1695." Irish Historical Studies 30, no. 117 (1996): 25-46.
[117] Lyons, Emma. "To "Elude the Design and Intention" of the Penal Laws: Collusion and Discovery in Eighteenth-Century Ireland—A Case Study." *Law and Religion in Ireland, 1700-1970* (2021): 49-75.; McGrath, Charles Ivar. "Securing the Protestant Interest: The Origins and Purpose of the Penal Laws of 1695." Irish Historical Studies 30, no. 117 (1996): 25-46.
[118] Ibid
[119] Ibid
[120] Ibid
[121] Ceallaigh, TJ Ó., and Áine Ní Dhonnabhain. "Reawakening the Irish language through the ırish education system: Challenges and priorities." *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education* 8, no. 2 (2015): 179-198.

unite the residual feelings of nationalism that would later be the vehicle for assertions of sovereignty and independence.[122]

Across the next century Ireland would follow a relative holding pattern. The *Act of Union* (1801) saw the formal merger of the British and Irish parliaments, with all governmental control now coming under the banner of the "United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland". Despite this *Act* being enacted with hopes of unifying the Catholic and Protestant classes, Ireland's Catholic majority would remain largely subjugated by British institutional control and rule.[123] And thus, the living conditions of Ireland were as follows – the majority population of Catholic Irish were employed for nominal wages that barely covered their own subsistence on the land. Rent was paid to English landowners who often held their residences in England, and most of the crops produced were exported internationally. Since sometime in the 1600s, the majority crop grown in Ireland had been the potato.[124] Introduced from Latin America, it grew rapidly in Ireland due to the mix of rain and wildly fertile soil.[125] Much of the Island had already been long since converted to an agricultural economy some 300 years earlier.[126] In acknowledging the potato's role in feeding the Irish, Ó Gráda offers that "[it] is the most versatile food known to man".[127] Over 50% of Irish agriculture depended on the potato to some degree.[128] So central to the Irish labourer's diet was it that some Irish workers were documented as consuming upwards of 5kg of

[122] Ibid
[123] Kelly, James. "Popular politics in Ireland and the Act of Union." In *Ireland and Anglo-Irish Relations since 1800: Critical Essays*, pp. 3-31. Routledge, 2017.; Whelan, Kevin. "The other within: Ireland, Britain and the Act of Union." *Acts of Union: The Causes, Contexts and Consequences of the Act of Union* (2001): 13-33.
[124] Ó Gráda, Cormac. *Black '47 and Beyond The Great Irish Famine in History, Economy, and Memory*. 4th print., 1st pbk. print. [af 1999]. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2000.
[125] ó Gráda, Cormac. *Famine: a short history*. Princeton University Press, 2010.
[126] Ibid
[127] Ibid
[128] Ó' Gráda, Cormac. *Famine: a short history*. Princeton University Press, 2010.; Ó'Gráda, Cormac. "The Great Hunger 1845–1850." In *The Great Irish Famine*, 32-56. New Studies in Economic and Social History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

potatoes on the daily.[129] For a population whose diet was largely made up of potatoes and buttermilk, any affront to the crops could spell certain catastrophe. When word came of a *blight* spreading across European trade routes, the Irish people's impending doom was solidified.

An Drochshaol (the Hard Times)

Though its scientific name is *Phytophthora infestans,* "blight" gets its name for its causing of rapid decay and rot in plant tissue.[130] In potatoes, blight causes the decomposition of the plant's tubers, as well as an infection of the subsoil.[131] So aggressive are the spores that they can be wind-carried, as well as passed along through a winter in infected soil.[132] Blight is generally understood to have arrived in Europe by 1844, were initial accounts of brown rotting in potatoes were taken.[133] By the autumn of 1845, some reports in Ireland had claimed that over 1/3 of the North's crops had already been lost, and by the new year, reports of starvation and death began.[134] The atrocities were widely reported in the press, which employed a variety of Catholics and sympathizers. In "The Great Hunger 1845–1850", Ó Gráda offers that headlines became so common that "soon notices of 'deaths by starvation' lost their newsworthiness".[135] He goes on to display examples of various stories published in newspapers around the United Kingdom and worldwide, including the following snippet from the *Cork Southern Reporter;*

[129] Ibid
[130] Majeed, A., S. Siyar, and S. Sami. "Late blight of potato: From the great Irish potato famine to the genomic era–An overview." *Hellenic Plant Protection Journal* 15, no. 1 (2022): 1-9.
[131] Ibid
[132] Ibid
[133] Ibid; Kinealy, C., King, J., and Moran, G. "The Great Famine Revisited" in Kinealy, C. (Ed.). (2018). *The History of the Irish Famine: Volume I: The Great Irish Famine*. (1st ed.). Routledge.
[134] Kinealy, C., King, J., and Moran, G. "The Great Famine Revisited" in Kinealy, C. (Ed.). (2018). The History of the Irish Famine: Volume I: The Great Irish Famine. (1st ed.). Routledge.
[135] Ó'Gráda, Cormac. "The Great Hunger 1845–1850." In *The Great Irish Famine*, 32-56. New Studies in Economic and Social History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

"*You will think this very horrifying; but were you to witness the state of the dead and dying here at Toureen[136], it would be too much for flesh and blood to behold. [..] I need make no comment on this, but ask, are we living in a portion of the United Kingdom?" [137]*

Nationalist sentiment in Ireland was only reinforced by *an Gorta Mór*'s devastation.[138] Many could not comprehend the paternalistic Crown's inability to respond to the crisis and began to suspect that their negligence was purposeful.[139] While some support the notion that the policies that enabled the famine were genocidal in nature, their claims are largely refuted. McGowan instead offers that the blame is more likely placed on the systematic, *laissez-faire* capitalism that England practiced as Ireland's landlord.[140] Distinctly, it was the aged land-holding and tenement system that was more so to blame.[141] No doubt, this disruption of land-positive relations contributed to the fallout from the Famine.

With an inability to produce their subsistence crops, and an almost complete loss of product from the 1846 potato season, tenants were both starved and unable to meet their rent obligations to their overseas landlords.[142] The landlords, to their own right, were unable to meet

[136] Toureen, Co. Tipperary was among the harder hit regions by the Famine. Given the connection between the population density of Irish Catholics in the South and West of the Island, it should come as no surprise that some of the heaviest losses were recorded in these areas, where potatoes were even more heavily depended upon. My family's land is in the south-central region of Luimeach. Famine stories of the time are hard to reach – there remains to be emotional trauma associated with their discussion. It is certain that famine did reach our lands, particularly given my experience on Kockfierna in 2016. Despite this, I have never been given direct confirmation that some of our family members were lost to *an Gorta Mór*.

[137] Ó'Gráda, Cormac. "The Great Hunger 1845–1850." In *The Great Irish Famine*, 32-56. New Studies in Economic and Social History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

[138] Donnelly Jr, James S. "The Construction of the Memory of the Famine in Ireland and the Irish Diaspora, 1850–1900." *Éire-Ireland* 31, no. 1 (1996): 26-61.; McGowan, Mark G. "The Famine Plot revisited: A reassessment of the Great Irish Famine as genocide." *Genocide Studies International* 11, no. 1 (2017): 87-104.; Miller, Kerby A. "Emigration, Ideology, and Identity in Post-Famine Ireland." *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 75, no. 300 (1986): 515-527.

[139] Miller, Kerby A. "Emigration, Ideology, and Identity in Post-Famine Ireland." *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 75, no. 300 (1986): 515-527.

[140] McGowan, Mark G. "The Famine Plot revisited: A reassessment of the Great Irish Famine as genocide." *Genocide Studies International* 11, no. 1 (2017): 87-104.

[141] Ibid

[142] Kinealy, Christime. *This great calamity: the great Irish Famine: the Irish Famine 1845-52*. Gill & Macmillan Ltd, 2006.; Ó' Gráda, Cormac. *Famine: a short history*. Princeton University Press, 2010.

their own export demands, causing them to raise the rents and evict their tenants.[143] With no option, many starving Irish simply collapsed on the roads, begging for sustenance as they withered away.[144] Accounts regarding the conditions seen across the south and west describe scenes of catastrophe hitherto unseen. In *Famine Pots*, Padraig Kirwan offers the journal entry shared by Nicholas Cummins, a Cork man who had visited the town of Skibbereen, some-hundred kilometres south of my own family's homestead:

> *"I was surrounded by at least 200 of such phantoms, such frightful spectres as no words can describe. By far the greater number were delirious either from famine or from fever. Their demonic yells are still ringing in my ears, and their horrible images are fixed on my brain."*[145]

The human impacts over the course of *an Gorta Mór* are staggering. While statistics vary, it is generally acknowledged that the Famine caused the death of over 1,000,000 Irish between 1846-1851, with a further 1,000,000 having emigrated outwards to the U.S., Canada and Australia, among others.[146] When set against Ireland's estimated population of 8.5 million pre-Famine, the loss of Irish life is clear. So, too, is the loss of Irish culture. Just as the worst-struck areas were the most densely populated by subsistence Irish farmers, equally worse-struck were areas where the Irish language could be heard the most.[147] Many native speakers would perish, and with them, the stories of the language, the land and its people.[148] In many ways, the social fabric of the Nation itself was torn, ripped apart by the aching stomachs and the collective cries.

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[143] Ibid
[144] Ibid
[145] Words from the reporting of Nicholas Cummins, shared in: Kirwan, P. "Recognition, Resilience, and Relief: The Meaning of Gift" in *Famine Pots: The Choctaw–Irish Gift Exchange, 1847–Present*. Howe, LeAnne, and Padraig Kirwan, eds. MSU Press, 2020. At 7.
[146] Kirwan, P. "Recognition, Resilience, and Relief: The Meaning of Gift" in *Famine Pots: The Choctaw–Irish Gift Exchange, 1847–Present*. Howe, LeAnne, and Padraig Kirwan, eds. MSU Press, 2020.
[147] Lochlainn, Antain Mac. "The Famine in Gaelic Tradition." *The Irish Review (1986-)* 17/18 (1995): 90-108.
[148] Ibid

Those cries remain a haunting presence in the collective memory of the Irish. Not unlike the memories of the Trail of Tears that behold the Choctaw, recollections of the Famine, and its scars upon the land, remain ever present. Despite these scars, a field of debate pertaining to the relevance of the Famine's ongoing impacts to Irish culture holds space. Some, such as Valente, challenge that the connectivity between famine and the Irish identity is mere *ethnostalgia*[149], and thus, equal parts intentional and un-intentional in its recollection of famine impacts on a people.[150] In contrast, past leaders such as former *Uachtarán na hÉireann* Mary Robinson have reinforced its influence in the collective ethos of the Irish Nation, offering that [the famine] "shaped us as a people. It defined our will to survive. It defined our sense of human vulnerability and remains one of the strongest, most poignant links of feeling that connects us to our diaspora".[151] Notwithstanding the Famine's ongoing impact on the collective conscious of the Irish being debated, it is universally agreed upon that its connection to the diaspora, and thus, the displacement of Ireland's people, is definitive.[152] The mass displacement of many Irish during the famine saw a great exodus outward.

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[149] As detailed in "Irish Hunger and Traumatic Memory", Valente offers the following definition of *Ethnostalgia*: "[it is] a homesickness for secure ethnicity that is also a longing to return to the ethnos as home". Certainly, and to a degree, many Irish descendants experience this "ethnostalgia" – one can look no further than the streets of Dublin on any given day, and encounter many visitors who claim some distant connection to the Nation. Perhaps I am party to this as well, to some degree. My ancestry remains much more recent, in this regard however, as most of my paternal family remains in Ireland. There is a larger discussion at work here, though. Allow us to consider the following – we experience a deep connection to the *ethnos* (in this case, both the land and its people) of our origin. Through that connection, we find our security, our belonging, and our purpose. And with those connections in mind, we find directive in our ways of relating to the world. In the context of settler states, like Canada and the United States, I feel this may deeply apply to many of the distant Irish connections within the diaspora. While I don't necessarily disagree with Valente's position, to disregard the impacts of trauma on collective memory and identity is to push aside many generational realities – we can look no further than the example of the IRSS in Canada. As seen through the rest of the Chapter, I attempt to expand upon the discussion of the influence of this traumatic memory upon the Irish settler identity. Nonetheless, it is a point of inquiry for further research.

[150] Valente, J. "Ethnostalgia: Irish Hunger and Traumatic Memory." In *Memory Ireland*, 174-. 3rd ed. Syracuse University Press, 2014.

[151] *Uachtarán na hÉireann* Mary Robinson in her address to the Choctaw Nation, Choctaw Tribal Complex, May 23rd, 1995.

[152] Corporal, Marguérite, and Jason King. "Irish global migration and memory: transnational perspectives of Ireland's Famine exodus." *Atlantic Studies* 11, no. 3 (2014): 301-320.; Delaney, Enda, and Donald M. MacRaild.

Here, some of the Famine's more notorious events are located – namely, the traumatic Atlantic journeys on the 'coffin ships' (*long cónra*). Named for the atrocious conditions born by the exacerbated Irish passengers, the coffin ships were planned passages that left Ireland for Canada and America, often experiencing heavy casualties over the crossing.[153] Many Irish became settlers themselves, and in some cases, they willingly engaged in injustices to Indigenous peoples that they had personally experienced at British hands.[154] This dichotomy of the colonized / colonizer is an important crossroads in this discussion – it acknowledges how a multiplicity of self-identities can influence the behaviours of a being, community, or Nation. Further, it leads to questions regarding the interconnectivity between land and being, and how they could influence sentiments of solidarity. In discussing the ongoing narrative of the Famine, Kearney makes an important distinction, offering that "whereas most conventional commemorations of the Famine have featured "people without land" […], we are confronted here with an uncanny experience of "land without people".[155] This personification of land, and thus, alteration of the possessor / possessed dynamic advanced by Western ways of knowing, represents an inception point for the cross-cultural solidarities that would be foundational to the Choctaw-Irish relationship.

For the Choctaw, it was the transportation of soils from *Nanih Waiya* that retained their connection to the sacred mound.[156] When they arrived in new lands, connections to their sacred

"Irish migration, networks and ethnic identities since 1750: an introduction." *Immigrants & Minorities* 23, no. 2-3 (2005): 127-142.; Kenny, Kevin. "Diaspora and comparison: The global Irish as a case study." *The Journal of American History* 90, no. 1 (2003): 134-162.

[153] McMahon, Cian T. "Tracking the Great Famine's" Coffin Ships" across the Digital Deep." *Éire-Ireland* 56, no. 1 (2021): 81-109.

[154] Thompson Rand, Jackie. "Reconciliation" in *Famine Pots: The Choctaw–Irish Gift Exchange, 1847–Present*. Howe, LeAnne, and Padraig Kirwan, eds. MSU Press, 2020.

[155] Kearney, R. "Memory and Forgetting in Irish Culture" in Friberg, Hedda, Nordin, Irene Gilsenan, and Pedersen, Lene Yding, eds. 2007. *Recovering Memory: Irish Representations of Past and Present*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

[156] Akers, Donna L. *Culture and customs of the Choctaw Indians*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2013.; Lambert, Valerie. *Choctaw Nation: a story of American Indian resurgence*. U of Nebraska Press, 2007.

places, and thus, their ways of knowing, being and doing, were retained. For the Irish diaspora, connectivity to the 'old land' remains grounded in both a physical and spiritual dimension.[157] To return and connect with the land is to connect with the self, inherently. But what are the implications of this connection? My response to this question finds its inception in the form of a simple, yet powerful gesture of aid, a *gift* of relationship offered by one Nation to another.

[157] Kearney, R. "Memory and Forgetting in Irish Culture" in Friberg, Hedda, Nordin, Irene Gilsenan, and Pedersen, Lene Yding, eds. 2007. *Recovering Memory: Irish Representations of Past and Present*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Chapter 3: Seeing all our relations as *gifts.*

"Whatever our gift, we are called to give it and to dance for the renewal of the world."

- Robin Wall Kimmerer in *Returning the Gift.*

The apple orchard in Secwépemcúl̓ecw

Across the street from my family home in *Secwépemcúl̓ecw,* there is a large apple orchard. It runs for a kilometre or two, down towards the lakeshore road in one direction and further along our road in the other, parallel for another six hundred metres or so. For as long as I've known, 'home' has been surrounded by orchards, forests, and fields. Something about the mix of sun exposure from being up on a great hill, the lush, saturated, and nutrient-rich soil in the spring, and the proximity to the lake's humid gusts. This past winter, I had moved home and began my graduate coursework online. I had recently been living for an extended spell in *Glas Naíon*, and before that, lək̓ ʷəŋən territory. I felt like I had been on the road, *journeying*, both literally and figuratively, for some time. Though my energy had been spent reconnecting with my ancestral places, during that period I often found myself lost in thoughts about *Secwépemcúl̓ecw*. How the fall colours would paint streaks of gold across the mountains. How the chilly winter mornings would give way for a crisp afternoon, the sun setting in a sea of blue and white out to the far end of the lake's arm. And later, how the spring rains would once again bring the hues of green dashing across the landscape.

I returned a slightly different person than the one who left, that is for sure. My perspective had been shifted, as one does when they are exposed to new sights, sounds, people, and their ways of being. My time in *Eire* encouraged me to think differently about how we all relate to the land that surrounds us, including those relations that we hold with it, and the interconnectivity that exists between all of us. I remember a trip my Uncle Martin and I took once, across from *Baile Átha Cliath* to *Gaillimh.* The drive took us several hours. For stretches,

we would follow the M6 road, but divert off to rural roads where there might be a specific thing he wished to show me. At one point we stopped the car and strolled, leisurely, out and into the field that bordered the roadside. It was deep brown, and the exposed soils looked as though they had been cultivated using a square saw. Perfectly rectangular, a series of semi-solid logs appeared to be drying, stacked in rows above the excisions. These were peat logs, excised portions of dried *sphagnum* moss that formed much of *Eire*'s bog lands. For a time, they were among the primary heat sources for many Irish families, in both rural and city settings. They burned hot and long, often much better than the moist logs that could be acquired from a blackthorn, or an ash. Now though, their usage as a fuel source has been banned throughout most of the country. Specific rules apply to claim-owners who wish to share their products, and for the most part, bogs are being left to regenerate. My interest in bog harvesting practices had stemmed from my efforts to understand how my family in *Eire* farmed, largely in comparison to the practices of the small-scale fruit orchards that surrounded my other home. My grandfather has long shared stories of the labour-intensive schedules they had to uphold on our farm in *Luimneach*, from digging irrigation drains by using stones as tools, to walking cattle overnight to nearby town markets.

My first winter back in *Secwepemcúl̓ecw*, in the orchard across the street, a solitary figure begins working sometime in January. I recognize them because they always drive a faded grey and blue SUV and carry a portable radio. As the sun rises, their music echoes across the snowbanks. They tend to the apple trees as though they are old friends, trimming their branches and greeting them each morning. Even in frigid temperatures, they arrive and tend to the trees. As the snow melts and seeps back into the soil, the trees wake from their winter sleep. The leaves return, the soil begins to dry, and small tufts of grass and other greenery appear at the base of the

trees. The figure continues, now throwing down different nutrients, ensuring the trees are well-fed. It is summer before the first buds begin to form on the tender branches. Though these months were plagued by the low-hanging smoke from a desperate wildfire season, the bulbs continued to grow, slowly shifting to a deep, luscious red in colour. As I packed my things again to move to my new home near *ʔəlqsən*[158], the trees had born apples, the fruit of all their energy storage throughout the cold winter and smoky summer. The apple season has always been one of my favourites. It feels like such an *intentional* act, to drive down to the stand of the family whose orchard is across from our house and find ourselves surrounded by old wooden boxes of beautiful apples. More colours and varieties than I can process. It is a powerful thing, to hold an apple in your hand that comes from the soil where you sleep, where you experience all the emotions of a day. It is the aroma of home and tasting the apple itself feels like you are tasting all the flavours of a year in *Secwepemcúl̓ecw*.

The figure still returns each day. Sometimes they pick the apples from the trees, gingerly. Other times they cultivate and aerate the surrounding souls. Their work exemplifies a cycle of giving and reciprocity with the living Earth. As the trees are cared for, they store their energy, and express their gratitude in the form of these delicious fruits that hold all the year's flavours, and thus, all its stories. Their fruits bring joy, and nutrition. They sustain us. And so too, the figure meets our obligations to them. The relationship has encouraged me to consider what it would mean to see all my relations as though I were both the trees and the figure simultaneously. How if I care for my relations, they will care for me in reciprocity. How my relations themselves are *gifts.* And if I see them as *gifts,* their meaning is ongoing. They must be cared for and

[158] Near Point Grey, in Musqueam Territory. At the time of this original writing, I had not yet begun my work with Musqueam. Little did I know my journeying would later continue with my accepting a role and choosing to stay here.

reciprocated on to the next. To break them, or resist my obligations to them, is to dishonour them.

Introduction

In 1847 a group of Choctaw gathered an offering of support for the Irish. This support would come in the form of a collection of raised funds that were sent to an aid organization in St. Lous to support Famine relief from overseas. Though their gift was financial, its true intention was far greater than that. This *gift* was one of *relationship* - a recognition of the shared hunger and suffering that colonial displacement had brought upon their Nations. From their offering of solidarity, a sacred relationship would be formed, bound by the ongoing meaning generated by a cycle of *gift* and *reciprocity.* In instances of need, they would extend their support, caring for their relations and their obligations to one another. So significant, too, would this relationship be, that it would solidify its place in the collective memory of two different, independent, and interconnected Nations of beings. To this day, both Nations maintain this *gift-reciprocity relationship*.

As I have established in Chapter 2, there were existent solidarities and shared experiences in colonialism for both Nations – from collective memories to deep interconnectivity with the land. Their relationship to such themes as *hunger*, *displacement,* and *cultural assimilation* hold considerable weight in the collective memories of both peoples and thus, are a distinct point of connection for their relationship building. In this chapter, I begin by sharing the story of the *gift* – from the Choctaw's meeting and the resultant impacts of their offering, including the dimensions of intentionality behind their giving of the *gift* of *relationship.* The context for this decision is well discussed by scholars both Choctaw and Non-Choctaw alike – in particular, it is the work of

Choctaw knowledge keeper LeAnne Howe and her "*tribalography*"[159] methodology that puts the Choctaw order of *Ima* ("to give")[160] into practice. I pursue this by exploring *gifting societies* and their practices further and support this discussion by contending with the works of Tully[161], Kimmerer[162] and Umeek.[163] In addition, I look to the *social capital* of gifting, and the ways it has been used for both positive and negligent means, across history. Inherently, examples are found within the Canadian government's own past in this regard. From these examples, I conceptualize *gift relations* in the context of the Choctaw-Irish example – including a description of the ways in which we can look to *all our relations* as *gifts* and the implications of putting these theories into praxis. This is only a portion of the *circle of reciprocity;* however. Chapter 4 will discuss the

[159] *Tribalography* is a rhetorical space, or methodology, wherein Indigenous story is studied for the advancement of Indigenous self-determination, empowerment, and Nationhood development, among others. Inherently, it is also a fiercely decolonial research ethos. Coined by the Choctaw Scholar LeAnne Howe, it represents a contemporary to much of the *storywork* methodology that I do in this work. For more on the conceptualization of *tribalography* consult: Howe, LeAnne. *Choctalking on Other Realities*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2013. For an example of *tribalography* in practice, consult: Howe, LeAnne. *Shell Shaker*. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books,2001.

[160] I approach this study of *Ima* with care and consideration – as I have stated, I am not Choctaw, and do not wish to take away from Choctaw voices in these crucial discussions on the Nation's ways of knowing, being, and doing, as well as legal orders. However, in the context of the *gift*, and to do *storywork* within my overlapping, and contending identities, I intend to do my best to honour *Ima* by sharing how the Choctaw's actions were more than just offerings of aid – they were reflective of what makes the Choctaw, Choctaw. This work, at its core, intends to honour their *gift*, as well as demonstrate that their *gift-reciprocity relationship* with the Irish is exemplary moving forward.

[161] University of Victoria Professor *Emeritus* James Tully is a crucial voice in the settler academic world – he has published various works detailing research on relationship building, multinational citizenship, and Indigenous relationships with the Land and other beings. Also, I must thank him for his (unknowing) indirect role in my being here to do this *storywork*. My earliest mentors in the academic space are Dr. Keith Cherry and Dr. Pablo Ouziel, two of Dr. Tully's former graduate students whose class (The European Union: A Critical Dialogue on Political, Legal and Economic Integration) I took in the spring of 2020 at the University of Victoria. Through their tutelage (and learning together) I learned about horizontal democracy and forms of resistance within the reconciliation context. For the purposes of this project, it is Tully that I have drawn inspiration from for the name and conceptualization of *gift-reciprocity relations.* However, these forms of relations are existent since time immemorial, and are exemplified in the ways of knowing, being, and doing of many Nations.

[162] I must deeply thank Potawatomi Citizen-Scholar and Botanist Robin Wall-Kimmerer for the knowledge shared to the world in her seminal work *Braiding Sweetgrass*. Her discussion on *gift*, *gratitude* and *reciprocity* have all been deeply inspirational to this project. For more on her work see: Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. First edition. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2013.

[163] Umeek (E. Richard Atleo) is a Nuu-Chah-Nulth hereditary chief and scholar. His seminal work, *Tsawalk: A Nuu-chah-nulth Worldview,* discusses the Nuu-Chah-Nulth's worldview in the context of their governing principle of *tsawalk* (everything is one). This work was greatly inspirational to me in learning about *interconnectivity* between all things. Again, I express my gratitude for the sharing of these understandings. For more information consult: Atleo, Eugene Richard. *Tsawalk a Nuu-Chah-Nulth Worldview*. Vancouver, B.C: UBC Press, 2004.; Atleo, Eugene Richard. *Principles of Tsawalk : An Indigenous Approach to Global Crisis*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011.

concept of *reciprocity* (giving back) and how it is inseparable from effective *gift* ways of being. Conceptually, *gift relations* represent a means of knowing, being and doing that sees *all our relations* in mutually reinforcing and equitable ways.

Skullyville, March 23rd, 1847

By the 1840's the displaced Choctaw had begun the process of rebuilding their Nation's communities – though the Trail of Tears had left over 6000 Choctaw separated from the rest of the tribe, most of their remaining population had settled in "Indian Territory".[164] A new government had been formed, including a new written constitution and series of laws.[165] As we have acknowledged, to be Choctaw is to endure, and endure they did. Nonetheless, the cries of sorrow from the Trail remained ever-present in the minds of many Choctaw – the loss of loved ones and the aches of hunger from the Trail's grasps had only occurred a mere decade prior. Thus, when news of a great famine an ocean away reached the Choctaw in their strange new lands, it was no simple occurrence.

Over this period, written media and news outlets had spread outwards to "Indian Territory", bringing news from around the world to the doors of Choctaw citizens, including the *Choctaw Telegraph*.[166] While many of these newspapers have since been confirmed to be under the directive of missionaries and other settler owners, to their own right, many employed Choctaw citizens, and published stories that they selected. Alternatively, several Nations had started their own newspapers that published materials in their own languages, such as the *Cherokee Advocate* and the *Cherokee Phoenix*.[167] When many publications included headlines

[164] Akers, Donna L. "Removing the heart of the Choctaw people: Indian removal from a native perspective." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 23, no. 3 (1999).; Birchfield, D. L. The Trail of Tears. United States: World Almanac Library, 2003.; Lambert, Valerie. *Choctaw Nation: a story of American Indian resurgence*. U of Nebraska Press, 2007.
[165] Lambert, Valerie. *Choctaw Nation: a story of American Indian resurgence*. U of Nebraska Press, 2007.
[166] Shrout, Anelise Hanson. "A "Voice of Benevolence from the Western Wilderness": The Politics of Native Philanthropy in the Trans-Mississippi West." *Journal of the Early Republic* 35, no. 4 (2015): 553-578.
[167] Ibid

that covered the atrocities that were resultant from the Famine in Ireland, waves of concern began to emanate from Choctaw and Cherokee communities.[168] These waves would take hold, for it was in April of 1847 that the Arkansas Intelligencer ran a story about "voice[s] of benevolence from the western wilderness of the western hemisphere" coming in the form of a series of donations made and collected by Choctaw and Cherokee communities.[169] At this time, outlets were reporting upwards of 2500 Irish deaths weekly through late 1846, with a death toll slowly rising to almost 300,000.[170] It was such that at on March 23rd, a meeting was called in Skullyville, a Choctaw community in the eastern corner of the state. Fittingly, the source of the town's name was the Choctaw word for money, *iskulli,* alluding to its role as the point of collection for annuity payments made to the Nation.[171]

At the meeting, word was shared of the atrocities that had befallen the Irish. Though there had been circulation of various infographic pamphlets calling for Famine aid, it is also likely that the headlines of the various news media were equally a point of discussion. This was no small ordeal for the Choctaw, not far-separated from their removal, and thus, experiences with famine on the Trail of Tears. The specific economic and physical conditions experienced by many Choctaw community members were varied – but many of those attending the meeting had certainly experienced trauma, illness and enormous financial setbacks over the course of the Trail.[172] So much so that Shrout ascertains "it is difficult to imagine a people less well-positioned

[168] Ibid
[169] Ibid
[170] Ó Gráda, Cormac. *Black '47 and Beyond The Great Irish Famine in History, Economy, and Memory*. 4th print., 1st pbk. print. [af 1999]. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2000.
[171] Kirwan, Padraig. "Recognition, Resilience, Relief: The Meaning of Gift." Journal of Transnational American Studies 13, no. 1 (2022).
[172] Donnan, Conor J. "Kindred Spirits and Sacred Bonds: Irish Catholics, Native Americans, and the Battle Against Anglo-Protestant Imperialism, 1840–1930." *US Catholic Historian* 38, no. 3 (2020): 1-23.

to act philanthropically".[173] As the meeting wore to a close it was agreed upon that the collection of supporting funds would be organized and sent to the Memphis Irish Relief Committee.[174] Currently, there is a discrepancy on the agreed-upon monetary sum that was sent by the Choctaw – some argue that it was 170$ in local currency[175], while others, working from the headlines of the *Intelligencer,* argue that the amount was 710$.[176] These discrepancies are alluded to a multitude of factors, from clerical error to the potential of nefarious acts by the aid committee itself.[177] The significance of either of these sums is uncontested – they both represent amounts in the thousands in modern US dollars.

While there is a debate on the exact amount given, and the two sums do hold considerable separation, it is their *intention* that this work aims to discuss. Perhaps it is Kirwan's sentiment for the matter that rings most true; that "the act of giving, and the form of international recognition that the gift symbolized, was of the [greater] significance".[178] The Choctaw's *gift* of solidarity sent shockwaves across the American project, with many headlines covering their act at length. Of course, their *gift* was discussed in the context of a variety of perspectives by American settler media, including vile, subjugative positions that perpetuated anti-Indigenous sentiment and white hierarchy.[179] At its heart though, it was the philanthropic intention of the *gift,* and thus, its grounding in everyday, core practices of the Choctaw as a Nation, that best reflect its purpose and continued impact.

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[173] Shrout, Anelise Hanson. "A "Voice of Benevolence from the Western Wilderness": The Politics of Native Philanthropy in the Trans-Mississippi West." *Journal of the Early Republic* 35, no. 4 (2015): 553-578.
[174] Ibid
[175] Ibid; Kinealy, Christine. "An Ocean of Benevolence" in Howe, LeAnne, and Padraig Kirwan (Eds.). *Famine Pots*. United States: Michigan State University Press, 2020.
[176] Kirwan, Padraig. "Recognition, Resilience, Relief: The Meaning of Gift." Journal of Transnational American Studies 13, no. 1 (2022).
[177] Ibid
[178] Ibid
[179] Ibid

In discussing the intentions of the *gift,* positions can be found from both Choctaw and Non-Choctaw sources that support the narrative of *gifting relations.* For some, it is as a form of "politicized philanthropy" that the Choctaw chose to lend a hand in aid to the Irish.[180] This intentional practice is likely to have served a duality of purposes, from the effort to build *allyships* to the affirmation of the Nation's sovereignty, away from the invading federal government's control. For Kirwan, it is more so the collective memory aspect of the Nation's two histories that must be considered, stating that *gift* gave an opportunity for "the recognition of, as well as the opportunities to speak both to and about, cotemporal […] experiences of colonial rule".[181] These cotemporal experiences are the basis of a mutual, yet independent set of histories– of hunger, displacement, and cultural assimilation. Through that mutual experience, it is a space of *dialogical exchange* that is created. Such a space is presumed to hold the potential for both the support of social and political positions. Given the large swathes of Irish immigrants rapidly arriving in, and being dispersed through, the American territories, it is not hard to imagine that the Choctaw, renowned for their political and military prowess, could have held at least some part of their intention in ways that could support their cause with the United States Federal Government.

Equally, dissenting positions on this space of *gift exchange* exist and are not taken lightly. *Gifting*, as a form of social capital, has been practiced for thousands of years, and across many societies.[182] While its purpose and practice were understood across generations by the Choctaw, and many other Nations, Western academia only saw technical definitions for gifting as recently

[180] Shrout, Anelise Hanson. "A "Voice of Benevolence from the Western Wilderness": The Politics of Native Philanthropy in the Trans-Mississippi West." *Journal of the Early Republic* 35, no. 4 (2015): 553-578.; Thompson Rand, Jackie. "Reconciliation" in *Famine Pots: The Choctaw–Irish Gift Exchange, 1847–Present*. Howe, LeAnne, and Padraig Kirwan, eds. MSU Press, 2020.
[181] Kirwan, Padraig. "Recognition, Resilience, Relief: The Meaning of Gift." Journal of Transnational American Studies 13, no. 1 (2022).
[182] Mauss, Marcel. *The Gift: forms and functions of exchange in archaic societies*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press. 1925.

as the early 20th century. One of the foremost voices on *gifting* from this field is Marcel Mauss, the French linguist and historian who conceived "gift economies".[183] While Mauss's discussions on Northwest Coast Potlach were framed through highly colonial and subjugative arguments, his examples of *gifting* across different societies identified a common theme: that *gifting* exchanges, as the foundation of the *gift economy*, were perpetuated by *obligations to reciprocate*.[184] This framing of *relationality* through *obligation*, or indebtment, provides important context for some of how *gifting* has been abused across societies. In this regard, no example is more striking than the government of Canada's treatment of Indigenous Nations through indebtment and dependency systems, from the *Indian Act* to the Indian Residential School System.[185] Across the foundation of Canada, from the arrival of traders to the eventual (attempted) domination of Indigenous People and their Nations, Canada would abuse gifting and its intention. After the *Indian Act* was formalized, federal agents would offer on-reserve Nation members stipends or vouchers for food and supplies. By creating these power relations, the Canadian government was able to turn *gifting* from a space of exchange to a space of *systematic dependency*.[186] Thus, discussions on *gifting* must be done in the context of mutual benefit and *interdependence*, in turn.

In the context of the Irish-Choctaw relationship, these cautions are offered by Jackie Thompson Rand, a Choctaw Scholar and knowledge keeper. Thompson Rand notes that discussions on the *gift-reciprocity relationship* between the Irish and Choctaw should not be undertaken without the equally important narratives of the relations between Irish settlers and Indigenous Nations in the southeast, offering that "overlooked is the sad reality of what, in the

[183] Mauss, Marcel. *The Gift: forms and functions of exchange in archaic societies*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press. 1925.
[184] Ibid
[185] Satzewich, Vic, and Linda Mahood. "Indian agents and the residential school system in Canada, 1946-1970." *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* (1995): 45-69.
[186] Ibid

final analysis, it cost the Choctaws, and that is the pressure of more Irish countrymen turned new colonizers/settlers seeking Choctaw lands". [187]As such, it is important to denote the duality of roles that the Irish play as members of the *gift relationship* and active beneficiaries of the colonial project, as well as the implications that duality holds for a means of knowing, being and doing that practices seeing our *relations as gifts.* It is from within this space of *dialogical exchange*, however, that Rand sees a potential for meaningful action, offering that "here the Choctaws and the Irish peoples have an opportunity to experiment with the idea of reconciliation in a purposeful way".[188] It is with this work of *gift-reciprocity relations* that I hope to demonstrate a commitment to working within the *dialogical exchange* consciously. However, I wish to propose my doing so with a singular change – as opposed to doing so in a purposeful way, it is work done *in a good* way. *Good*, reflecting a recognition of the inherent dualities that exist as both a citizen of a *colonized* and *colonizer* Nation in equal ways, and the effort to bring *good* feelings, thoughts and intentions in acting upon the Choctaw's *gift.* Therefore, it is first from the Choctaw, and their own stories, that inspiration for these *good* ways of being should be drawn.

***Ima*: giving, to give**

The Choctaw's *gift* was much more than a monetary aid – it was an open hand, extended in support and recognition of a Nation whose shared experience under the colonial power had left them destitute, famished, and traumatized. The *gift* has been widely covered by various voices across the centuries since its offering. I will thus discuss it under the following certainties – that it is the basis of a diplomatic, mutually reciprocal relationship between two sovereign Nations, that its meaning has grown, and is ongoing, and that its occurrence was no mere

[187] Thompson Rand, Jackie. "Reconciliation" in *Famine Pots: The Choctaw–Irish Gift Exchange, 1847–Present*. Howe, LeAnne, and Padraig Kirwan, eds. MSU Press, 2020.
[188] Ibid

happenstance, but in fact, a direct reflection of the ways of knowing, being, doing and legal orders of a sovereign Nation. This direct reflection is best articulated in the Choctaw language, through *Ima*. As LeAnne Howe offers "*Ima*, giving, is a cultural lifeway and shows a Choctawan sense of prosperity in ancient times, as in the present".[189] As a cultural lifeway and foundational element of the Nation's *body politic*, *Ima* represents a tenet of the Choctaw epistemology – that it is through *gift* that relationship, and thus, *allyship* is born.[190] Choctawan allegiances with European society were not limited to the Irish – as discussed in Chapter 2, their early military ally was the French. Evidently, that allegiance did not create the same connection as the *gift* to the Irish, as was the case with the Choctaw's giving of their lands to the US government during their removal.[191] In comparing the Choctaw's giving to the Americans, Howe offers that "we gave and the Americans took".[192] This contrast of *giving* and *taking* is the basis by which the Choctaw's charitable action resulted in a new, *reciprocal* relationship with the Irish. For just as the Choctaw *gave*, and *gave* again, it was also the Irish who *gave back* in turn, at other times of need.[193] For the Choctaw, the giving of gifts is not a mechanism of social power being held over its allies – it is an *obligation*, binding the giver to the redistribution of goods and support for the building of community.

This obligation to give is reflected in LeAnne Howe's seminal methodology, named "*tribalography*". Through the telling of Native stories, creation accounts and legal orders, *tribalography* works to express the oral traditions of a Nation.[194] In discussing *tribalography*'s purpose, Howe offers that it "comes from the native propensity for bringing things together, for

[189] Howe, LeAnne. "Ima, Give: A Choctaw Tribalography" in *Famine Pots: The Choctaw–Irish Gift Exchange, 1847–Present*. Howe, LeAnne, and Padraig Kirwan, eds. MSU Press, 2020.
[190] Ibid
[191] Ibid
[192] Ibid
[193] Ibid
[194] Howe, LeAnne. *Choctalking on Other Realities*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2013.

making consensus, and for symbiotically connecting one thing to another".[195] Thus, it must be recognized that for the Choctaw, to be Choctaw is to embrace *Ima*. To give. So central is *gift* to the Choctaw tribalography that many of the Nation's stories talk of a cycle of *gift* and *reciprocity* between *Nanih Waiya* and her people. One such example is the Nation's "Green Corn Ceremony", and the story of its source.

"[Two hunters come upon an Unknown Woman standing at a distance, on a mound] […] The Unknown Woman tells the two men that she's hungry, and they offer her roasted hawk meat. This special meat of the hawk is all they have, so they give it willingly. The woman eats only a small bite, then tells them to return the following mid-summer at the same place atop the mound. She promises she'll be there. The next year, at exactly the same time, the two hunters return and find corn growing atop the mound. From the hunters' initial gift of sacred food to the Unknown Woman, Choctaws and other southeastern tribes received the gift of corn."[196]

Willingly, the hunters gave all that they had to the Woman. Their commitment to *Ima* was so devote, that even the smallest offering of hawkmeat was readily given to support another being in need. In return for their *gift*, the Choctaw hunters found themselves party to a *circle of giving*, and in turn, the mound offered them the *gift* of corn in *reciprocity.* Thus, it was through these instances of *gift* and *reciprocity* that the Choctaw held their relations – with the living Earth and other Nations around them. As the basis of these relations, such cycles of *gift* and *reciprocity* establish a means of connection that perceives the relations *themselves* as *gifts*.

[195] Howe, LeAnne. "Ima, Give: A Choctaw Tribalography" in *Famine Pots: The Choctaw–Irish Gift Exchange, 1847–Present*. Howe, LeAnne, and Padraig Kirwan, eds. MSU Press, 2020.
[196] Howe, LeAnne. "The Story of America: A Tribalography" in Shoemaker, Nancy (Ed). *Clearing a path: Theorizing the past in Native American studies*. Routledge, 2014.

All our relations are *gifts*

Seeing relations themselves as *gifts* is an intentional, everyday practice that is foundational to many Indigenous Nations, Peoples and communities. This practice, for our purposes, is best described as being what James Tully calls "*grounded* in an *ethos of trust*".[197] Through this *ethos of trust*, one works to find solidarity in oneself and in others. It is from that solidarity that a means of being characterized by *interconnectivity* itself is perpetuated. When *trust* is developed between beings, a connection is established, and through that connection, a cycle of *gift* is perpetuated. The associated possibilities of opening oneself to the *gift* of *relationship* are also important, and Tully notes that doing so "accepts the inevitability of vulnerability, uncertainty, conflict, suffering, injustice, unfairness, distrust, manipulation, force and fraud".[198] However, he offers an effective response to these associated vulnerabilities, alluding to "trustfulness, peacefulness, truthfulness (*parrhesia*), compassion, empathy, conciliatoriness, courage, receptivity, and perseverance in the face of distrust and violence".[199] Therefore, seeing relations as *gifts* is not singular in its pursuit – like any example in the natural world, it opens itself to a plethora of interconnected, yet mutually independent realities that operate in a state of flux.

It is from this state of flux, and thus, this (all encompassing) natural world itself, that inspiration for *gift relations* is best introduced – as an invitation to *reciprocity* and *gratitude*.[200] In discussing her Nation's relations to the land and place in *As We Have Always Done*, Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamaoke Simpson offers that "meaning is derived through a

[197] Tully, James. "Trust, Mistrust and Distrust in Diverse Societies." In Dimitr Karmis & Francois Rocher (eds.), *Trust and Distrust in Political Theory and Practice: The Case of Diverse Societies*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens 2019.
[198] Ibid
[199] Ibid
[200] Ibid

compassionate network of interconnected relationships that are distinct and valuable because of their differences".[201] This conversation revolved around the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg story of *Kwezens*, a girl who discovers a source of sweet water from the trees during her walk. Her *doodoom* (grandmother) hopes to use this water to cook their meat that night and celebrates *Kwezens*' discovery as a *gift*. The story explores how the land supports the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg through its *gifts* and how they, in turn, support it back by caring for it.[202] Thus, it is through these *gift relations* that life *itself* is sustained. And if life is sustained through these *gifts*, we can extrapolate and say that such relations exemplify the interconnected, mutually-reliant cycles of *life sustaining life*.[203] Such a mutual sustenance of life through *gift* is best expressed as being *sacred* in its nature, conferring upon it a deepened meaning – in both its care and the mutual obligations that it incurs. In discussing the promotion of *Bimaadiziwin* (life), Simpson shares the example of the meeting place of *Mnijikanming*, where the Mississauga would meet the Fish Clans and renew their relations annually, noting:

"Nishnaabeg people only fished at particular times of the year in certain locations. They only took as much as they needed and never wasted. They shared with other members of their families and communities, and they performed the appropriate ceremonies and rituals before beginning. To do otherwise would be to ignore their responsibilities to the fish nations and to jeopardize the health and wellness of the people".[204]

[201] Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. "Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation." *Decolonization: indigeneity, education & society* 3, no. 3 (2014).
[202] Ibid
[203] Tully, James. "Life sustains life 2: The ways of reengagement with the living earth." In *Nature and value*, pp. 181-204. Columbia University Press, 2019.; Tully, James. "Reconciliation Here on Earth" in *Resurgence and reconciliation: Indigenous-settler relations and earth teachings*. Asch, Michael, John Borrows, and James Tully, eds. University of Toronto Press, 2018.
[204] Simpson, Leanne. "Looking after Gdoo-naaganinaa: Precolonial Nishnaabeg diplomatic and treaty relationships." *Wicazo Sa Review* 23, no. 2 (2008): 29-42.

Those responsibilities demonstrate the *meaning* that is conferred upon the *gifts* given by one Nation in relation to another. *Meaning*, as conferred upon a *gift* relation, reflects the ability that a *gift* must create connection between the giver and the recipient. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Kimmerer highlights the ability a *gift* being given can have for creating connection, noting "the more something is shared, the greater its value becomes".[205] Thus, when we see a relationship as a *gift*, and treat it so, its meaning to the recipient increases over time. To Tully, it is this increase, across temporal and spatial plains, that leads one to an understanding that they are "embedded" in a series of relationships that are equally interdependent and co-sustainable.[206] Further, it is from these interdependent, co-sustainable means of relation that lessons, legal orders, and epistemologies are drawn.[207] Central to these understandings is that self-reflective ethos – that the interconnected web of relations that we all hold exist in a form of cyclical symbiosis. Akinto Howe's discussions on *tribalography,* Simpson's employment of the sharing of *stories* as a communication of her Nation's legal orders and relations to the world reinforces a *sacred,* symbiotic recognition of the relations with all beings – from the other clans to the trees. Similarly, it is through the stories of plants that Kimmerer communicates her teachings – that when we care for plants as kin, they participate in an ongoing relationship founded in *gift* in turn.

At this juncture, it is important to denote some specific language that is important to the identity of *gift relations* themselves. As Simpson discusses *Bimaadiziwin* within the context of a "interconnected web of relations", the terms "all my relations" and "all our relations" have both

[205] Kimmerer, Robin Wall. "The Gift of Strawberries". In *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed editions, 2013.
[206] Tully, James. "Reconciliation Here on Earth" in *Resurgence and reconciliation: Indigenous-settler relations and earth teachings*. Asch, Michael, John Borrows, and James Tully, eds. University of Toronto Press, 2018.
[207] Ibid

been discussed widely by many Indigenous Nations, their scholars, knowledge keepers and Elders.[208] In discussing this terminology, Thomas King offers the following definition:

"[They are] a reminder of who we are and of our relationship with both our family and our relatives. [They] also [remind] us of the extended relationship we share with all human beings. But the relationships that Native people see go further, the web of kinship to animals, to the birds, to the fish, to the plants, to all the animate and inanimate forms that can be seen or imagined."[209]

It is important, then, to discuss these *gift relations* as being within the context of *all our relations*. Doing so encourages ways of thinking that perpetuate interconnectivity between humans, non-human beings, and the natural world. As I have shown, one of the principal ways this is done is through the communication of legal orders and lessons through the sharing of *stories*. The giving of *stories,* as I hope to demonstrate in this work, is among the most sacred of traditions for the Irish and the Choctaw, to their own right.

But within the context of *gift relations*, what does it mean to share stories? They are best regarded as opportunities for mutual learning, understanding, and care. Regarding the space of *dialogical exchange* that was created upon the Choctaw's *gift* to the Irish, it is thus plausible to recognize an opportunity to learn together about each other, in a *sacred* way. Using the example of the Coast Salish Nations' *potlach*, Tully expresses the following.

[208] King, Thomas. "Introduction". *All My Relations: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Native Fiction*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990.
[209] Ibid

"Each brings the gift of their own way of looking at things to the dialogue, each is grateful for the other's gifts, and each reciprocates in turn: It sets in motion a virtuous learning cycle of gift-gratitude-reciprocity".[210]

Potlach is derivative of the Nootka concept of "pa-chitle" – which translates to "giving and giving in reciprocity".[211] Therein, it is through ceremony that a circular process of giving, receiving, expressing gratitude, and giving back that the interdependencies of life are communicated.[212] Allow us then to consider the following: that seeing *all our relations* as *gifts* perpetuates a virtuous cycle of learning, being, knowing and doing in equal measure. From that virtuous cycle, an ongoing *meaning* is conferred upon our relations. To uphold them, the parties involved must continue to treat them in a *sacred* manner – for to neglect to do so is to compromise one's mutual obligation to *gift*. And lastly, that through a *gift relation* one can begin to recognize one's place within the interconnected web of all things and ensure that they give back in *reciprocity.* This is the basis of the *gift-reciprocity* relationship. As I have shown, *gift* is only one half of this virtuous cycle, however. For it is the *reciprocal* act of giving back that completes the cycle and begins anew. This interdependent theme of *reciprocity* will thus be explored more deeply in the context of Chapter 4.

A conceptualization: on *gift relations*

From these stories, it becomes clearer that the Choctaw's willingness to give a hand in solidarity to the Irish is not solely a reflection of a simple monetary gesture of aid, but rather, a mutual recognition of a shared experience from both within and outside the colonial through displacement, famine and oppression. Moreover, it reflects *Ima*, a cultural lifeway of the Nation,

[210] Tully, James. "Deparochializing political theory and beyond A dialogue approach to comparative political thought." Journal of World Philosophies 1, no. 1 (2016).
[211] Ibid
[212] Simpson, Leanne. "Looking after Gdoo-naaganinaa: Precolonial Nishnaabeg diplomatic and treaty relationships." *Wicazo Sa Review* 23, no. 2 (2008): 29-42.

that encourages them to give to those in hunger and in need. Through *Ima*, the Choctaw perpetuate a form of relationality that is grounded in sustainability and *good* ways of being. Over the formation of the invading American state, the Nation displayed this practice often – from the giving to the French (in the hopes of forming military allyships), to the forced removal and unequitable cessation of their sacred lands to the American government. Despite these injustices, the Choctaw continued with the practice of *Ima.* As such, when an opportunity came to give a transatlantic *gift* of *allyship,* the Choctaw did so in good faith. This act not only saved lives – it created a *dialogical exchange* between two sovereign Nations, acknowledging a shared memory of hunger and displacement, all while opening a multiplicity of pathways for support and mutual aid. Their generous act exemplifies a means of being that treats *relations as gifts.*

To treat a *relation* as *gift* is to embrace the spatial, temporal, physical and spiritual worlds as an interdependent, *interconnected web* of relations. Doing so operates under an *ethos of trust*, encouraging parties to be equally vulnerable, caring, and considerate of one another's needs and impacts. This *ethos of trust* operates within an understanding of the world being in flux, and finds solidarity in the expression of *good* intentions, feelings, and actions. Treating *relations as gifts* represents a means of seeing them as *sacred.* From this treatment, one has the potential to be in a *good* way. It is from this *storywork* that I conceptualize the *gift relations* that we look to from the Choctaw-Irish solidarity. Looking to the giving of the *gift* acknowledges a multiplicity of shared perspectives and experience. Looking to the ongoing story of the *gift* and the resultant *reciprocity* that it generated builds upon this and supports its expression as a *gift-reciprocity relationship.*

Chapter 4: Reciprocating the *gift*

"They weave a web of reciprocity, of giving and taking. In this way, the trees all act as one because the fungi have connected them. Through unity, survival. All flourishing is mutual. Soil, fungus, tree, squirrel, boy—all are the beneficiaries of reciprocity."

- Robin Wall Kimmerer in *The Council of Pecans.*

Meitheal

It is November and the car is dashing along a series of windy rural roads, taking us through the countryside of *Luimneach,* and on to *Donoman*, the old Quilty farm in *Cromadh.* I am in the backseat of my Uncle Martin's heavily-worked Volkswagen Passat. My legs are crossed, and my knees are aching slightly. In the passenger seat, my other Uncle, Seán, is seated, with his woollen paddy cap and beige trousers in tow. They are telling me stories of their youth, and how all the families in the area used to work together to farm and care for one another in this area. This farming was hard, and they grew up in different times. Somewhat famously, rural *Eire* was not electrified until the mid-50s. For much of his youth, my grandfather (born in 1942) and his siblings lived by candlelight, or by fireside. The family homestead was a thatch-roofed cottage with dirt floors. The damp, cold and rain were all insurmountable. Most of the local families survived on cattle farming – the entirety of their lives were tied to their land and their relationship to it. Largely, this would have been a time before automobiles were commonplace. Horse-drawn carriages remained the norm, and sopping cycles across muddy roads were an everyday occurrence. And so, it was from this hard-weathered world that local families would try, each year, to make a go of things, despite the austerity that surrounded them. Perhaps one of the main reasons they made it was thanks to the incredible sense of unity felt amongst so many of the local families, which could manifest itself in many times of need.

As we wound our way through the roads of home, I asked Martin and Seán a bit more about where this sense of unity came from. I was interested to learn what made the local families so close – how they drew support from one another, and how they *gave* and *received* cyclically. Martin has always reinforced this understanding in the form of a word, which is now tattooed on my left arm. The word is *meitheal.* An old Irish term, it generally alludes to the farming communities of old, wherein the cooperative sharing of labour, without monetary compensation, would occur at specific times of the year. Families would help families in times of harvest, and the only exchange would be a reciprocated gesture of support to the other farms. When I contacted another uncle, Bobby, about *meitheal*, he shared the following.

"In the summer and autumn, we used to help a few of the neighbouring farmers in a meitheal system helping to ensure that their hay was saved as dairy farming was crucial to make a living. Our compensation was food, dinner, and company. The other big meitheal gathering was during the threshing[213] of corn in the Autumn. You would have more than 30 people working together to ensure the wheat, barley or oats were threshed for feed, or baking, or for sale. Everyone took part in some fashion. Often, the women in the family would provide food and drink such as bottles of stout to the hungry and thirsty workers. It created a great sense of camaraderie between the old and young."

The sense of camaraderie, between families, generations, and individuals, was a further point of inquiry, about which I called my grandfather. He communicated it not as an expectation, but more so, as an *understanding of reciprocity*. He offered this explanation:

[213] The threshing season traditionally lasted through the autumn. It refers to an agricultural technique of separating grain heads from straw. Eventually, machines would take over the traditional hand and instrument threshing techniques. For more on threshing in the Irish historical farming context, see: Clear, Caitriona. "Social change and everyday life in Ireland 1850–1922." In Social change and everyday life in Ireland 1850–1922. Manchester University Press, 2013.

"The people you helped made sure to reciprocate the support you gave them. It wasn't always in working on the farms. Sometimes it came in other ways – like you gave rides to people if you had an automobile and somebody had an appointment or a special need to get somewhere. You didn't forget. When you gave support to them you didn't expect it back – you just knew that in time it would be given back to you in a way. Maybe it felt more like a neighbourly duty."

In a more recent sense, *meitheal* is perceived as being akin to *community*, which was also a resounding theme from my most recent time spent in *Eire*. Uncle Martin, to his right, has built upon the word, establishing what he calls the *meitheal philosophy.* We have never given it a true definition – it is just understood. Community is built through the giving of *gifts* of support, and from that giving, support is given back in *reciprocity.* And on. The *meitheal philosophy,* unlike its namesake, does not correspond to seasonal events. It is an everyday, intentional means of being wherein support is *gifted,* and given on, with an understanding that eventually, it will be *reciprocated* in turn, all in the name of building, maintaining, and fulfilling the obligations of relationships. This intentional means of being is an embodied practice that Martin follows every day. He offers support for anyone in his community. Many an afternoon has been spent together stacking firewood, hauling furniture, and trimming lawns for people in the neighbourhood. His selflessness is nothing short of inspirational. Not unlike the Choctaw's practice of *Ima*, the formation of a *meitheal* is a deep commitment to give *gifts* of support wherever they are called upon. When a *gift* is given, its joys are given in *reciprocity*. This inherent duty to *gift* and *reciprocate* forms a cyclical relationship. And from that cyclical relationship, we may come to see what it means to be *in a good way*. *Reciprocity* exemplifies the other half of the *gift-reciprocity relationship* that I have discussed in Chapter 3. But where does this duty find its roots? Where do the intentions of *reciprocity* lie?

Introduction

The Choctaw's gift of solidarity in 1847 would make waves around the world. For many on the outside, it was incredulous that a seemingly impoverished Indigenous Nation would send cross-Atlantic aid. The *gift* would not be forgotten, forming the basis of a diplomatic Nation-to-Nation relationship that has continued evermore. Across history, multiple examples of the Choctaw and the Irish reciprocating these *gifts* exist – from various diplomatic envoys travelling between the Nations to participation in ceremonial events. More recently, however, it was the contributions to an aid fundraiser by Irish donors that articulated a continuation of the *gift-reciprocity relationship* between Nations. In 2021, several Navajo and Hopi Nation communities were experiencing a particularly difficult time responding to the COVID-19 pandemic's impacts. Community members were dying, and resources were thinning. Services were overworked, and the Nations were overwhelmed, with any relief request being rejected on behalf of the Trump government. The Nation thus turned to GoFundMe. Within days, the Navajo and Hopi relieffund received word of a large sum being sent to them on behalf of Irish donors in recognition of the aid once provided during *an Gorta Mór*. The individual donations varied – some as little as $10, while some were upwards of $100,000. Nonetheless, it was the call to *reciprocity* that was heard by many Irish.

In chapter 3, I discussed the ways in which the Choctaw embody *Ima* as a lived practice of giving. From *Ima,* and through a collective memory of the pain of the Trail of Tears, the Choctaw felt empowered to give a selfless *gift* of relationship to the Irish, offering aid in a time of unbearable need. Next, seeing relationships as *gifts* was established as an intentional way of knowing, being and doing. As I have shown, this praxis is foundational to the Nationhood and legal orders of many Indigenous Nations. By offering a helping hand to the Irish, the Choctaw initiated the formation of a *gift-reciprocity relationship,* the basis of which rests on a means by

which we see *all our relations* as *gifts*. This (*gifting* practice) is only one half of the *gift-reciprocity* relationship however - it is complimentary to and equally reliant on the practice of giving back in *reciprocity.* Such definitive *reciprocity* ensures that a relationship is mutually beneficial, equitable and kind in turn.

In this chapter, I will thus discuss the influence of *reciprocity* as a contributor to the ongoing *gift-reciprocity relationship* between the Choctaw and the Irish. With this example, I elaborate on how *reciprocity* forms a mutually reliant relationship with *gifting* and the implications of its practice. To support this, I will explore Umeek's discussions on Nuu-Chah-Nulth gifting and land relations, namely for their praxis of giving back to their lands. Then, in looking at the connectivity between human and non-human beings, I look to Kimmerer's discussions of *reciprocity* in *The Council of Pelicans* and several other works. In addition, I look at the differing ways in which *reciprocity* is expected, assumed, or intended within different Nations' *gifting* practices. Lastly, I look to Asch's works on *resurgent reconciliation* for further inspiration on the practical applications of *reciprocity* in the building and maintenance of relationships. I conclude by establishing *reciprocity*'s place as the complementary opposite of *gift* in the *gift-reciprocity relationship*. In the final chapter (Chapter 5), I will thus work through a discussion on the *gift-reciprocity relationship* and its implications for the everyday, intentional practice of being *in a good way*.

Cycles of the *gift*

Across the generations, the Choctaw Nation's *gift* would hold a special place in the collective memory of the Irish people. As Nations, they *saw* one another – having experienced similar oppressions of hunger and displacement. They *heard* one another – having delivered responses through various instances of politicized philanthropy and international solidarity. Kirwan summarizes the (ongoing) relationship post-*gift* by offering that "[The Nations] saw in one another's relationship to the land, sense of story, the memory of the ancestors, and connectedness to a world beyond their nations, forms of appreciation, spirituality, and generosity that resonated deeply with them.[214] This mutual reflection would hold shape in unexpected ways, and through unexpected times of need. As the century turned, the Irish would continue their fight for self-determination, with a series of bloody conflicts spanning decades. Their attempts to garner support would be far reaching – then-president Eamon de Valera, an Irish-American, would even take the project overseas circa 1919, taking a tour of the United States to acquire political alliances in their attempts to stunt English colonial control.[215] de Valera would not find extensive support from federal American leadership, however, with President Woodrow Wilson expressing his disinterest in the Irish cause as a priority for international relations.[216] With no support from the expected power of the continent, the trip could easily have been a complete failure. This would not be the case, as an invitation would come from Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa.[217]

This meeting would once again affirm the broader impacts of the Choctaw's *gift* decades prior – that the Irish Nation held distinct relationships with many Indigenous Nations and

[214] Kirwan, Padraig. "Recognition, Resilience, Relief: The Meaning of Gift." Journal of Transnational American Studies 13, no. 1 (2022).
[215] Ibid
[216] Ibid
[217] Ibid

communities, grounded in a mutual recognition of shared experience. That day, the community accepted de Valera as a ceremonial member, offering him a headdress and other *gifts.* In return, he offered them several rifles – likely as a symbol of resistance to the colonial oppressors that continued to affect both their Nations in various ways.[218] As de Valera was offered the stand to speak to the Nation that day, he opened his remarks in Gaelic, and proceeded to translate back to English, announcing:

"I speak to you in Gaelic […] because I want to show you that though I am white I am not of the English race. We, like you, are a people who have suffered and I feel for you with a sympathy that comes only from one who can understand as we Irishmen can. You say you are not free. Neither are we free and I sympathize with you because we are making a similar fight."[219]

His words were translated into Chippewan by an interpreter, and he was met with a rousing applause.[220] In discussing de Valera's visit to the Anishinaabeg, Kirwan offers that the meeting "concurrently arises out of, relies on, and produces a complex transatlantic narrative of recognition and acceptance".[221] It is this narrative, of recognition and acceptance, from which distinctions must be drawn. Foremost, de Valera's insistence to employ his Nation's own language (Gaelic) as a means of separating his people from the English is worthy of note. As I discussed in Chapter 2, some of the principal methods of both the English and American colonial apparatus involved restrictions on Nation's languages, respectively. For the Choctaw post-removal, it was through language education, training, and governance that much of the self-

[218] Ibid
[219] de Valera, Eamon. "Address to the Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa". Lac Courte Oreilles Territory, 18 October 1919.
[220] Ibid
[221] Kirwan, Padraig. "Recognition, Resilience, Relief: The Meaning of Gift." in *Famine Pots: The Choctaw–Irish Gift Exchange, 1847–Present*. Howe, LeAnne, and Padraig Kirwan, eds. MSU Press, 2020.

determination effort was taken.[222] Similarly, the Irish language would see a rise in everyday usage, national education, and formal delivery after the formation of the Irish Republic.[223] Ultimately, this intrinsic connection between language, identity, Nationhood, and self-determination affirms some of the transnational exchange space. By identifying a point of mutual experience, solidarities are fortified. *Gifts* are given and *reciprocated*, and connections are made. That de Valera would find allyships where he did reflects upon both Nations, and the continued meaning incurred upon the Choctaw's original gift. It would not be until 1922 that *Saorstát Eireann* was formed, because of the signing of the Anglo-Irish treaty in December 1921. The history of the relationship over the next 70 years is less known – presumably, both Nations were concerned with internal governance and Nation-building efforts over these periods. While records of this period are scarce, it is essential to note the underlying tension at play – that the Choctaw practiced *Ima,* that the Irish accepted that *gift*, and that though they received support from other Nations through their independence battle, their *reciprocity* to the Choctaw was not immediate.

In 1995, *Uachtarán na hÉireann* Mary Robinson paid visit to the Choctaw Nation. Her arrival was based upon a commitment to *renewal.* This renewal reflected the government's wish to express *gratitude* to the Choctaw for the *gift* 138 years prior. The visit had largely been organized in connection to recent events. In 1990, several Choctawan leaders travelled to *Eire* to participate in the first "Famine Walk", tracing the movements of the families at the height of *an Gorta Mór,* and two years later, an Irish contingent visited the Choctaw to participate in a Trail

[222] Akers, Donna L. "The Physical and Spiritual World of the Choctaw People". In *Living in the land of death: The Choctaw Nation, 1830-1860*. MSU Press, 2004.
[223] Walsh, John, and Wilson McLeod. "An overcoat wrapped around an invisible man? Language legislation and language revitalisation in Ireland and Scotland." Language policy 7 (2008): 21-46.

of Tears reenactment walk.[224] These movements, of bodies between lands, would form the basis for Robinson's own journey, in addition to a conversation she shared with the Choctaw artist (and later, Irish resident), Waylon Gary Whitedeer. In her opening remarks, Robinson adressed the Nation in their own language, first saying "Chahta I yakne ala li kut na sa yukpa" (I am glad to come to Choctaw country).[225] Later, she addressed her previous conversation with Whitedeer and its influence on her intention to return and renew their relations as people, noting Whitedeer's position that participation in charity walks served as a means of remembering their shared past.[226] Such remembering, she offered, was a means by which they could "complete the circle" that the Choctaw had initiated all those years ago.[227] On one hand, Robinson's words could be interpreted as her consideration of the *gift* returned, and thus, the transaction completed. Alternatively, however, these words, that trip, and that moment could be perceived as being the true inception of the ongoing *gift-reciprocity relationship* between the Nations.

And so, it would continue, this giving of *gifts* and acts of *reciprocity* in turn. By 2018, the *Taoiseach* Leo Varadkar had returned to the Choctaw with an announcement for a special scholarship program between the Choctaw Nation and *Eire* – offering free tuition to members of the Nation. Around this time, a sculpture honouring the Choctaw's gift was unveiled in *Corcaigh.* Named *Kindred Spirits*, the sculpture is a collection of stainless-steel Eagle feathers arranged in a circle[228]. These instances all correspond to an important recognition – that their relationship is

[224] Robinson, Mary. "SPEECH ON THE OCCASION OF HER VISIT TO THE CHOCTAW TRIBAL COMPLEX". Durant, Oklahoma. June, 1995. https://www.president.ie/en/media-library/speeches/speech-on-the-occasion-of-her-visit-to-the-choctaw-tribal-complex
[225] Ibid
[226] Ibid
[227] Ibid
[228] When I first visited *Baile Atha Cliath* in 2016, I was told of the sculpture's existence while visiting a museum. It was on a walk around St. Stephen's Green, near the city-centre, that Uncle Martin first shared the story of the Choctaw's *gift* with me. It would be several years later, circa 2020, that I began learning more about the Choctaw – Irish relationship, while studying at the University of Victoria, in the political science department. For more on Kindred Spirits see: Militante, Jessica. "Kindred Spirits." *IJAS Online* 9 (2020): 45-48.

circular in nature. The *gifting* is ongoing. From this view, we can see that one is never only *gifting* – they are also *reciprocating*, simultaneously, for the *gifts* given and received. By the time of *Kindred Spirits*' unveiling, the two Nations had renewed their relationship through *gift* and *reciprocity* time and again. They had come together to honour their past and remember their shared history. Yet, an opportunity remained to present itself for the Irish to return the same helping hand once offered to them in a time of great suffering. Over some 150-plus years, the *gifts* given and *reciprocated* by the Choctaw and the Irish have thus come to extend outwards across the interconnected web of relations, so to speak. This *reciprocity* is unique not for its recipients, who have practiced such ways of being since time immemorial. Rather, it is the intention behind it that is more worthy of exploration and will be done so further in this chapter. As opposed to an *expectation* of *reciprocity*, it is the *understanding* that *reciprocity* will come, in any manner of forms, eventually. But what is the root of this *understanding*?

***Iyyi kowa* – giving back to those in need**

By May of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had already struck the United States with force. Despite international news outlets citing New York and other major cities as the most extreme hotspots for infection, illness and death, it was the Navajo Nation, whose lands covered parts of Utah, New Mexico and Arizona, who beheld the highest per-capita rate of COVID-19 infection, with some reports of the period estimating them to have upwards of 2,304.41 cases per 100,000 people – far greater than New York or New Jersey alone.[229] The Navajo (and another Nation, the Hopi) had tried to appeal to the Trump Administration for extra federal supports for relief – including clean water, food and medical supplies to no avail.[230] When they turned to

[229] McGreevy, Ronan. "Irish People Donate €2.5m to Native American Tribe Devastated by Coronavirus," The Irish Times, November 20, 2020, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/irish-people-donate-2-5m-to-native-american-tribe-devastated-by-coronavirus-1.4414963.
[230] Ibid

GoFundMe for crowdfunding relief, news of the fund reached across the Atlantic.[231] Over the course of a few days, the fund raised over $2 million USD, with a large percentage (upwards of $500,000 USD) coming solely from individual, small-scale donations made by and estimated 26,500 Irish sources.[232] To this day, donations continue to pour in. Many of the comments left on the GoFundMe page by the Irish donors acknowledged the Choctaw's *gift* in 1847 as the inspiration for their offering, with some comments saying such things as "A deep generational debt is owed by Ireland to the Choctaw Nation and all other Native Americans"; "The Choctaw Nation in their distress helped us Irish in ours" and "No one have more who had less. Grá mór ages buíochas". In acknowledging the Irish response to the Navajo and Hopi Nations, the Choctaw Chief Gary Bratton offered:

"We are gratified – and perhaps not at all surprised – to learn of the assistance our special friends, the Irish, are giving to the Navajo and Hopi Nations. Our word for their selfless act is iyyikowa – it means serving those in need."[233]

In Choctaw *Iyyi kowa* is translated to "broken foot". Yet, its actual meaning corresponds to the understanding that those with broken feet will be supported in times of need.[234] Interestingly, it also corresponded to how Choctaw would come together in times of need, and work together to accomplish tasks that would benefit the whole community, such as the building of houses or farming.[235] When community members worked together to accomplish tasks, they understood that such support could come in various forms and that their *gifts* of support would be

[231] Ibid
[232] Ibid
[233] Bratton, Gary. Quote in "Choctaw and Irish History". https://www.choctawnation.com/about/history/irish-connection/
[234] Choctaw Nation. "Iyyi Kowa: A Choctaw Concept of Service". Iti Fabvssa. 2013. https://choctawnationculture.com/media/32768/2013.12%20%27Iyyi%20Kowa%27-%20A%20Choctaw%20Concept%20of%20Service.pdf
[235] Ibid

reciprocated in turn. *Iyyi kowa'*s presence in Choctaw society is explained in a 2013 edition of "Iti Fabvssa", a column in the Choctaw Nation's newspaper, *Biskinik.* Iti Fabvssa offers the following description:

"On an appointed day, the community would get together and bring the needed workforce and materials to help the family meet its needs. At Iyyi Kowa, everyone had a job, from doing the work itself, to cooking for the workers, to keeping the cooking fire going. It was a time of good spirit and friendship, where people worked hard, but also laughed and upheld the other people."[236]

Inherently, a connection could be identified with the Irish practice and formation of a *meitheal*. In times of great need, community is fortified through collective action and mutual support. As community is strengthened, core values are reinforced, and thus, *culture is solidified*. The article continued with a short interview of Olin Williams, a Choctaw Nation member who had grown up participating in *Iyyi kowa.* When asked about the nature of the word, he offered that it was "just Choctaws being Choctaws", but continued by acknowledging its value for cultural revitalization, stating;

"[…]as cultural people, if we can do the service ourselves, we can recapture some of our cultural ideals. [Iyyi kowa] would help bring pride back, along with a sense of community and family, […][as it's] vital in preserving our culture."[237]

His first comment, about "Choctaws being Choctaws", once again affirms some of the Choctaw Nation's core principles. That *gifting* is inherent to who they are, and that *reciprocity*

[236] Ibid
[237] Ibid

forms the complimentary action of that way of being.[238] His second, in discussing the potential [*Iyyi kowa*] holds for cultural revitalization, equally compels us to consider the influence of everyday, embodied practices as contributory means of asserting cultural protocols. *Reciprocity,* in both theory and praxis, thus completes the circle, serves a contributor to *gift relations*, and solidifies ways of knowing, being and doing. So impactful, has the Choctaw's *gift* to the Irish been, that it has been *reciprocated* in ways that have grown to positively affect a variety of different Nations. Though it came some 170 years later, the *reciprocity* of the Irish came in the form of a new helping hand, offered to different Nations in need, just as they once were. And, in the spirit of Robin Wall Kimmerer, their initial *gift* was then given on in *reciprocity,* conferring upon it an ongoing *meaning.*

This conferred, ongoing *meaning* upon relationships is seemingly confirmed by *Uachtarán na hÉireann* Michael D. Higgins in the foreword of *Famine Pots.* In discussing the ways in which the Choctaw's aid has impacted the Irish's practices of aid relief, Higgins noted that "[that] bond of humanity is what we have in common, what we share with other peoples in the world, and what encourages us, today again, to reach out to countries who suffer from extreme poverty and hunger, and those who must leave their homeland and seek refuge from persecution or war".[239] He would go on to acknowledge the ways in which their *gift* encourages the Irish to pay forward the generosity.[240] Just as the Irish sought to pay forward the Choctaw's *gift*, so too did the Navajo. A year later, in 2021, when word of massive COVID-19 outbreaks in

[238] Akers, Donna L. "The Physical and Spiritual World of the Choctaw People". In *Living in the land of death: The Choctaw Nation, 1830-1860*. MSU Press, 2004.; Howe, LeAnne. "Ima, Give". In *Famine Pots: The Choctaw–Irish Gift Exchange, 1847–Present*. Howe, LeAnne, and Padraig Kirwan, eds. MSU Press, 2020.
[239] Higgins, Michael D. "FOREWORD: A Word from the President of Ireland". In *Famine Pots: The Choctaw–Irish Gift Exchange, 1847–Present*. Howe, LeAnne, and Padraig Kirwan, eds. MSU Press, 2020.
[240] Ibid

India reached them, the Navajo elected to send over thousands of masks and other medical supplies. When asked about the Nation's decision, the Navajo President acknowledged their decision to pay it forward, offering that "friends all across the country, all over the world — even *Ireland* — helped us out with supplies and monetary donations because we were still waiting for the federal government to give us our share of the CARES Act".[241] Again, connections between his comments and Kimmerer's own discussions on *reciprocity* must be acknowledged, where she mentions the understandings of the obligations conferred upon a *gift relationship*:

> *"The essence of the gift is that it creates a set of relationships. The currency of a gift economy is, at its root, reciprocity."*[242]

Just as Choctaw Nation Chief Bratton offered, the Irish *gift* to the Navajo has thus been a means for their original *gift* to be reciprocated, all while opening the possibilities for the Navajo and the Irish to develop new relationships with one another, of which there is no greater *gift*. If we are then to look at this cycle, of *gift* and *reciprocity*, as an interconnected web of relations, or ongoing meaning, or even an extension of *roots* like those of a tree, as existing within this relationship between the Choctaw Nation and the Irish Nation, we must do so while considering the ways in which *reciprocity* and its intentionality inform the *gift-reciprocity relationship*, and thus, are companion to the ways in which we see *all our relations* as *gifts*.

[241] Winslow, Ben. "Navajo Nation sends PPE to help COVID-ravaged India". Fox 13 News, Salt Lake City. https://www.fox13now.com/news/coronavirus/local-coronavirus-news/navajo-nation-sends-ppe-to-help-covid-ravaged-india

[242] Kimmerer, Robin Wall. "The Gift of Strawberries". In *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed editions, 2013.

Intentionality

At this juncture, I feel we must acknowledge the timescales with which the Irish reciprocated the Choctaw's *gift*. As I have shown, this relationship-building process took *time*. As it should - but allow me to elaborate. In Chapter 3, I discussed the creation of spaces of *dialogical exchange* as meaningful points of initiation, connection, mutual support, and solidarity between groups. I then offered the *ethos of trust* as a contributory framework with which relationship-building processes could occur. In acknowledging a more "Westernized" means of thinking, we could expect that the giving of a *gift* would incite the giver to *expect* one back with haste, for to forget to do so could be perceived as a theft, or compromise of moral contract. The immediacy of *reciprocity* is thus a point worthy of exploration. But how would the Choctaw have interpreted it? It is not my place to offer a definitive response to that question, but rather, to explore its source. In contemplating it, however, I am drawn back to consider the story of Unknown Woman and the two brothers, standing upon the mound. When asked, the brothers gave, and gave without hesitation. They did not do so expecting an immediate *gift* in return. The Unknown Woman could have merely accepted their *gift.* Yet, it was her telling them to return, the next year, to the same spot, to find her own offering in *reciprocity*. In the context of the Green Corn Ceremony, it should thus be established that the Choctaw do not perform it with the *expectation* that the corn will return. Rather, it is the *understanding* that the *gifts* must be given, as they will eventually be *reciprocated* in turn.[243] This knowledge, not unlike Tully's relationship-building *ethos of trust*, is thus an inception point where which the *gift-reciprocity relationship* could be emboldened. As I discussed in Chapter 3, *Ima,* and thus, the practice of *gifting* itself, is central to Choctaw ways of knowing, being and doing. If we look to *Ima* as being

[243] Howe, LeAnne. "The Story of America: A Tribalography" in Shoemaker, Nancy (Ed). *Clearing a path: Theorizing the past in Native American studies*. Routledge, 2014.

one side of the cyclical, embodied practice of *gift-reciprocity,* then surely this understood *reciprocity* holds an equal, independent weight in the perpetuation of the relationship itself. In acknowledging its role, Donna L. Akers offers that "[reciprocity] was at the heart of all relations, including those formed by kinship or clan. Relations with outsiders followed the precepts of kinship, and to Choctaws, these relations were not a parody of kinship relations, but were, in fact, actual kinship realized".[244] This realized-kinship could then be understood as such – that its formation would rest on a *gift-reciprocity* connection, which was not *expected*, but, when realized by both parties, *understood*. In the context of both the Choctaw's *Iyyi kowa* and the Irish *meitheal,* we can thus see that both Nations have respective practices by which *reciprocity* is *understood* as a cyclical element – that support given is support earned, and that community well-being is beneficial to *all our relations*.

The *Gift-Reciprocity Relationship*

Let us then proceed under the following determinations – that the cycle of *gift-reciprocity* is both an intentional and embodied *practice*, that it affirms cultural protocols, and that it aims to propagate well-being across the *interconnected web* of *all our relations*.[245] This intentional and embodied practice is marked by a unique means of connecting between parties – each feels their place in a cyclical pattern of giving and receiving all at once.[246] Their reaction to this cyclical pattern, if effective, allows them to move across through the world in a *grateful* manner.[247] Thus,

[244] Akers, Donna L. "The Physical and Spiritual World of the Choctaw People". In *Living in the land of death: The Choctaw Nation, 1830-1860*. MSU Press, 2004. 44.
[245] Ibid; Howe, LeAnne. "Ima, Give: A Choctaw Tribalography" in *Famine Pots: The Choctaw–Irish Gift Exchange, 1847–Present*. Howe, LeAnne, and Padraig Kirwan, eds. MSU Press, 2020.; Kimmerer, Robin Wall. "The Gift of Strawberries". In *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed editions, 2013.; Tully, James. "Reconciliation Here on Earth" in *Resurgence and reconciliation: Indigenous-settler relations and earth teachings*. Asch, Michael, John Borrows, and James Tully, eds. University of Toronto Press, 2018.
[246] Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed editions, 2013.
[247] Ibid

the cyclical *gift-reciprocity relationship,* as proposed through the example of the Choctaw and Irish relations, could also be perceived as having a resulting expression that exists both within the cycle and all around it – *gratitude.* But where does the *gift-reciprocity relationship,* and thus, *gratitude* as both an expression and resulting emotion hold the most significance? Let us first return to the notion of the interconnected web of *all our relations.* In a discussion on the Nuu-Chah-Nulth governing principles, Umeek explains the ways in which *gift-reciprocity relationships* serve as a means of maintaining *balance* between all things.[248] He introduces the *potlach* as a ceremonial practice that is rooted in *gift*, *reciprocity,* and *gratitude* equally. In first acknowledging the ways in which the *potlach* works to maintain balance, he notes:

"Reciprocity was common between the Nuu-chah-nulth and the salmon, between the Nuu-chah-nulth and the cedar tree, between the Nuu-chah-nulth and the bear, and between my great-grandfather Keesta and the whale […] [and] reciprocal gift giving and assisting one another became a law that, when properly followed, meant that poverty was non-existent".[249]

Reciprocity, as a reflexive act, allows the recipient of a *gift* to exist in a state of balance, governed by an expression of *gratitude* in turn. Where the Nuu-Chah-Nulth maintain cycles of *gift-reciprocity* with *all their relations,* such common, Western systematic inequalities as poverty are deemed inconceivable. As balance is maintained, all are cared for, all are supported, and all are *recognized*. It is this understanding of *recognition*, too, that Umeek offers as a contributory element to the maintenance of harmony and balance, respectively within the *potlach* system. In describing its influence in ceremony, he notes 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

[248] Atleo, E. Richard. *Principles of Tsawalk: An Indigenous approach to global crisis*. University of British Columbia Press, 2011.
[249] Ibid at 166.

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)".[250] If we are to proceed with this understanding in mind, the cycle of *gift-reciprocity* becomes clearer. The natural world and her ecosystems operate in a state of harmonious balance. *That which is.* The natural world will correct itself. *Gifts* given will be *reciprocated,* and *gratitude* is perpetuated.

In the context of relationality, this understanding is best articulated in what Tully calls a state of "systematic interdependence". [251] Within this state, we recognize that human beings, as all beings, hold a *reciprocal* relationship with the universe, upheld through protocol and ceremonious modes of being.[252] Through these modes of being, balance is maintained, and equilibrium is achieved. But how does the formation of a *gift-reciprocity relationship* facilitate this equilibrium? In contemplating its contributions, it is best considered as an *embodied* practice. As expressed through ceremony or protocol, *embodied* practices of this form solidify culture itself.[253] If a culture of *gratitude*, founded upon *gift-reciprocity relations,* becomes the normative practice of a Nation, community, group or individual, its positive impacts will surely spread out across the interconnected web. These *embodied* practices, and thus, cultural protocols, are not proximal to the imagination – as I have demonstrated with my exploration of the Choctaw, they represent the foundational elements of many distinct, sovereign, and independent Nations who continue to maintain relationships in this way. *As they have always done*.

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[250] Atleo, E. Richard. "Preface". In *Principles of Tsawalk: An Indigenous approach to global crisis*. University of British Columbia Press, 2011.
[251] Tully, James. "Reconciliation Here on Earth" in *Resurgence and reconciliation: Indigenous-settler relations and earth teachings*. Asch, Michael, John Borrows, and James Tully, eds. University of Toronto Press, 2018.
[252] Atleo, E. Richard. "Preface". In *Principles of Tsawalk: An Indigenous approach to global crisis*. University of British Columbia Press, 2011.; Hilton, Carol Anne. "Ceremony as an expression of wealth". In *Indigenomics: Taking a seat at the economic table*. New Society Publishers, 2021.; Tully, James. "Reconciliation Here on Earth" in *Resurgence and reconciliation: Indigenous-settler relations and earth teachings*. Asch, Michael, John Borrows, and James Tully, eds. University of Toronto Press, 2018.
[253] Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. "Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation." *Decolonization: indigeneity, education & society* 3, no. 3 (2014).

Such a *gift-reciprocity relationship* represents much more than an exchange, or moral contract between groups. It is a form of harmonious co-existence, of gratitude, and of mutual recognition. It is an action-based form of relation – parties are obligated to respond to the ever-changing natural state of flux by being reflexive, all while facilitating equilibrium. As I have discussed, the Choctaw Nation's actions, in offering a *gift* of relationship to the Irish, have supported a cyclical pattern of giving between two Nations of beings. Through this *gift-reciprocity relationship,* positive impacts have propagated across the interconnected web of relations. Meaning has been conferred on and again. This form of relation, at its core, is a means of finding an *equilibrium* between all beings. But where does this *equilibrium* see its most important need to be met? In pondering these questions, Tully offers that such forms of relationship-building and collaboration aid us to "[…] reconcile differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and live together, not only by learning the arts of conciliation, or peace-making, but also the arts and sciences of learning to live sustainably with the living earth".[254]

Allow us to consider these *embodied* practices once again in the context of being *in a good way*. Their application is aligned with what Michael Asch has called a "robust resurgence", which he affirms "infuses reciprocal practices of reconciliation in self-determining, self-sustaining, and inter-generational ways."[255] In support, he offers the example of treaty talks as a location of implementation for such a resurgence. As distinct, ceremonial forms of relationship building between Nations, treaty-making represents a point of renewal, obligation, *gratitude,* and

[254] Tully, James. "Reconciliation Here on Earth" in *Resurgence and reconciliation: Indigenous-settler relations and earth teachings*. Asch, Michael, John Borrows, and James Tully, eds. University of Toronto Press, 2018.
[255] Asch, Michael. "Back to the Future: Confederation Treaties and Reconciliation" in *Resurgence and reconciliation: Indigenous-settler relations and earth teachings*. Asch, Michael, John Borrows, and James Tully, eds. University of Toronto Press, 2018.

equilibrium between parties.[256] If we can consider a treaty that is founded upon a *gift-reciprocity* means of relation, we can recognize the underlying obligations that we hold to *all our relations* involved and impacted by our decisions. The cycle of *gift* and *reciprocity* can continue, infusing an onus upon all of us to recognize our similarities and celebrate our differences. In acknowledging the impacts that *gratitude* can have for the goodness of the world, Kimmerer shares the following.

"*It is human perception that makes the world a gift. When we view the world this way, [our relations] are transformed. The relationship of gratitude and reciprocity thus developed can increase the evolutionary fitness of both plant and animal. A species and a culture that treat the natural world with respect and reciprocity will surely pass on genes to ensuing generations with a higher frequency than the people who destroy it." [257]*

The *gift-reciprocity relationship* between the Choctaw Nation and the Irish is much more than an ongoing exchange of mutual aid. It is a harmonious mode of being that mutually reinforces the self-determination and ceremonial protocols of two Nations. Its great achievement has been the ways in which it has created ongoing impacts across an interconnected web of relations. Without the Choctaw's *gift*, *Eire* herself would not be able to respond to instances of hunger and displacement around the world. For the Choctaw, they have affirmed the greatest of obligations – *Ima*. To give. *Just* as they once rose from *Nanih Waiya* and entered this world, the Choctaw give back to it in *reciprocity,* expressing their *gratitude* in a myriad of ways. These

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[256] Noble, Brian. "Treaty Ecologies: With Persons, Peoples, Animals, and the Land" in Resurgence and reconciliation: Indigenous-settler relations and earth teachings. Asch, Michael, John Borrows, and James Tully, eds. University of Toronto Press, 2018.; Simpson, L. B. (2008).; Simpson, Leanne. "Looking after Gdoo-naaganinaa: Precolonial Nishnaabeg diplomatic and treaty relationships." *Wicazo Sa Review* 23, no. 2 (2008): 29-42.; Starblanket, Gina & Stark, Heidi. "Towards a Relational Paradigm− Four Points for Consideration: Knowledge, Gender, Land, and Modernity" in Resurgence and reconciliation: Indigenous-settler relations and earth teachings. Asch, Michael, John Borrows, and James Tully, eds. University of Toronto Press, 2018.

[257] Kimmerer, Robin Wall. "The Gift of Strawberries". In *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed editions, 2013.

Nations are joined through shared experiences – of hunger, displacement, of attacks on land, language, and culture. But also, of *fundamental* acts. Of *meitheal* and *Iyyi kowa.* When you *gift* support, *understand* that it will come back to you in *reciprocity*, and on again. Through this cycle of being, *gratitude,* through intentional, embodied practices, is expressed. This, at its essence, is being *in a good way*.

For the final chapter, I will thus look to the Choctaw and Irish example of the *gift-reciprocity relationship*, and its influence on practices of expressing *gratitude,* in support of inspiring *good* means of being for *all*. As I close this chapter, I feel implored to return to Kimmerer and her discussion of this great cycle, of *gift*, *reciprocity,* and *gratitude* in the spirit of harmony. In consideration of where we may draw inspiration for the *embodied* practices that facilitate the gift-reciprocity relationship, she states that "the grass in the ring is trodden down in a path from gratitude to reciprocity. We dance in a circle, not in a line".[258] Indulge me then, as I offer you a hand, so we may join this circle and dance all together.

[258] Kimmerer, Robin Wall. "Returning the Gift". In *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed editions, 2013.

Chapter 5: Actions for being *in a good way*.

"A great longing is upon us, to live again in a world made of gifts. I can scent it coming, like the fragrance of ripening strawberries rising on the breeze."

- Robin Wall Kimmerer in *The Gift of Strawberries.*

Qwa:qlis

There has been many a weekend that I have spent out visiting Pacheedaht territory, moving along the roads past *Ditiida* and on to *Qwa:qlis*, where I have dedicated a lot of time to surfing the winter swells and searching for solitary waves. Inherently, a lot of this time has been spent driving, but also moving, seeing, and *listening.* It was a year or so ago that I began to hear it. Or, maybe, it was when I finally learned how to *listen* properly. What I heard was not one thing, but rather, a cacophony of sounds – all the voices of the land and the water simultaneously sharing their independent, yet mutually reinforcing rhythms. *Qwa:qlis* has a way of leaving you in awe no matter what the conditions are – from a powerful, tumultuous day, the winds and the rains whipping beneath a blanket of dark skies, the seas alive and pulsating with energy, to a slow, quiet sunset out over the distant peninsula, with a few glassy waves breaking over the rocky point at the southern corner.

The inspiration for what became a daily practice came from several sources. One of my instructors at the University often started our days with a prayer in Cree; "kinanâskomitinân kotak kîsikâw ê-miyiyâhk" meaning "we thank you for giving us another day". Equally, it was during this period that I began to consider the *gifts* that these places gave me, every day I visited them. For the great joy I felt, upon catching one of these waves, the sense of awe that came from the sight of the great Sitka spruces swaying in the wind, or the peaceful tones of the cold raindrops striking my face and the sea around me as I looked skyward. I always left feeling *whole* again – reenergized by the spirit that *Qwa:qlis* seemed to share with me. I felt the great joy

of all the *gifts* I had received and knew they had to be passed on in *reciprocity*. Above all else, I began to feel *gratitude* for every new day and all that it could bring. I knew, too, that I needed to find a way to express my *gratitud*e for the places and their *gifts.* To be *in a good way*. And so it was with this overwhelming *gratitude* that I began my own, intentional daily practice, of giving thanks.

As I approached the ocean before me, I took a moment, got on one knee, and traced my palm through the water, feeling the pull and push of the tides. I closed my eyes and returned to the *gratitude* within me.

Thank you for sharing your gifts with me.

Thank you to all those who have been, all those who are, and all those who will be.

Above all, thank you for this new day.

Actively expressing *gratitude* gave me a different means of approaching my interactions at these places. I felt an obligation to care for them, to share my *good feelings* with them, and to consider the web of relations that existed around me. Just as the storm cycles come and go, the cycle of life comes and goes at *Qwa:qlis.* Even after years of returning, reconnecting, sharing, and listening, there remained to be lessons to be learned on her shores.

As they often are, it was an average summer day, unbothered by clouds or cold, instead born out of clear skies and a long pink sunset. Pink, at the distant opening of the Strait, and fading to red, then orange, and eventually, a deep starry blue to the east. I was out at the far side, by the river mouth, where the Pacheedaht held a seasonal village. Sets were rolling in like teal freight trains and crashing on the reef. There were only a few of us out, chasing a residual swell from a rare summer storm cycle. As I paddled over a set wave, a voice called out to me:

There is a whale here! the voice announced. I could make out a single surfer, past the outer reef, paddling back toward me. *The whale is right below you; I think it's a baby!* the surfer affirmed. A wave of anxiety rolled across my temple. I had never encountered a whale at *Qwa:qlis,* but many a sea lion. There was a large colony of them on the edge of the southern bay, and they weren't always enthusiastic to have surfers in their midst.

Before I could respond, the seas to my right began to boil and suck downwards. A bus-sized figure slowly rose from the depths, hung at the surface, and turned back towards the sea floor. A great tail exited the water in its wake and sunk back with it. The whale was a light gray, with traces of pink. It was encrusted by barnacles and a few blotches of white. Surely, they were feeding, tracing the coastline, and looking for summer nutrients churned up by the shifting currents. Just as soon as it appeared, it was gone, leaving me and the other surfer alone amongst the waves. I couldn't help but smile and feel the wave of *gratitude* wash over me once again. Even after all these years, *Qwa:qlis* had more to share with me. More *gifts* to offer. More stories to tell.

I turned, and paddled in for shore, feeling full of the days' *gifts* received and *reciprocated* in turn. As I walked up the trail, I paused for a moment. The worn footbridge at my feet ran above a small creek that twisted and merged with the river to the north. Long ago, a friend of mine used to take a minute or so at the end of a surf day to lay in the creek. I always wondered why they did that and joined them blindly. And so, today, with that feeling of overwhelming *gratitude*, I entered the creek and laid down. I floated at the surface for a while, held up by the buoyancy from my wetsuit. The creek had a deep pool right at the edge of the bridge, and it was there that I heard it again. I closed my eyes and listened to the rhythms of the creek and the melodies of the forest around me. Sediment would pass along beside me, nudging my ears and

whispering to me. All around me was alive, the creek a canvas on which the land's dreams were painted. I could hear the beating heart of *Qwa:qlis*, and could return to the memory of each frigid winter morning, each radiant afternoon and each long sunset. I recognized it. The onus to share these *good feelings*. To *reciprocate* the day's *gift.* And so, I did. Just as the creek carried the dreams of the land, I focused on sharing my *good feelings* back to it. Sending them along the streaks across the canvas, imbuing all my love and *gratitude* with every breath I drew out. Then, I rose from the creek bed, grabbed my surfboard, and began the hike back to the parking lot, and home. Later, as I passed the open cut block a few kilometres from *Qwa:qlis,* I pulled over to the roadside and looked out to the mouth of the Strait. Swell lines were making their way down like the rungs of a washboard. The water twinkled teal and blue. All around me, a light wind was shaking the greenery and trees at the roadside. I thought I heard a voice in the wind, a whisper of affection and care from somewhere else. I drew a deep, clear breath and expelled deeply in return.

Introduction

The *gift-reciprocity relationship* between the Choctaw Nation and the Irish is founded upon a harmonious cycle of giving. From this cycle, the relationship itself is considered a *gift*, conferring upon it a *sacred* and *ongoing* meaning. Through this means of relationship building, positive impacts have been incurred upon both Nations in a myriad of ways, spreading across the interconnected web. But what can be learned from this relationship between the two Nations? As an intentional, embodied practice, the formation of *gift-reciprocity relationships* and the expression of *gratitude* both serve as supportive elements of being *in a good way.* In Chapter 4, I built upon the previous Chapters by discussing the *gift-reciprocity relationship* as both a conceptual framework and everyday practice for relationship building. From the example of the *gift-reciprocity relationship* between the Choctaw Nation and the Irish, themes may be drawn

that could inform one's pursuit to employ these intentional, embodied practices in their own lives. The following Chapter seeks to discuss several key Actions for the reader to consider in their own journeying to being *in a good way*.

Thus, allow us to proceed with the following determination: as a collection of intentional, embodied practices, the lessons drawn from these *gift-reciprocity relationships* can support being *in a good way*. Being *in a good way* takes various forms - from working to recognize one's positionality and social location, learning more about the land and its people on which one is situated, and working to navigate one's influence in the making of positive change. With these examples and reference to my own journeying, I discuss several key themes ('Actions') gleaned from this project's exploration of the Choctaw Nation and the Irish's *gift-reciprocity relationship* and the implications they have for being *in a good way.* From these Actions, I offer opportunities for individuals to pursue their own journeying.

First, I look to the sacred process of treaty-making, as shared by several authors such as Noble, Simpson, Starblanket and Stark. Through sacred treaties, parties may come together when needed to *renew* their relations and obligations to one another. As such, I look to *renewal* as the first action for being *in a good way*. Inherently, for one to *renew* one's relations, one must be a party to the cycle of *gift-reciprocity* that I have discussed, and thus, one must begin to think *relationally* – from the treaty-making practice of *renewal*, we may recognize that Nation-to-Nation relations have often been founded upon interconnectivity. Next, I look to *gratitude*, as both an emotion and action, for informing being *in a good way.* By expressing *gratitude* for the Land and Places where we live, we begin to recognize our own interdependencies. We see them as *gifts* – and thus, we learn to treat them as *sacred*. Then, in keeping with a key theme from this work, I look to the practice of *story listening* – to *all our relations* – as a means of supporting an

equilibrium within one's theory and praxis. Through this journeying, I have tried to explore a multitude of stories – from the Choctaw's experiences on the Trail of Tears, to the Irish with *an Gorta Mór*, and the lessons from their (ongoing) Nation-to-Nation relationship. As I have shown, interconnectivity can be found when we think *relationally*. Doing so builds connections and incurs an onus to pass on our *gifts* given and *reciprocated* in turn.

To understand our interconnectivity, we must ensure that stories are shared and *heard*. *Story listening* enables us to pause and reflect upon the experiences of others. Equally, it encourages us to reflect upon our own experiences, deciding where our *good* feelings and intentions should be directed and shared. From that space of reflection, being *in a good way* encourages us to explore ourselves and our relationship to these processes of reconciliation and reconstruction. In doing so, we may come to reflect upon our own histories, and ask ourselves some questions – Where are my ancestors from? What connections do I have to this Land? Who is the Nation whose Land I call home? As I close the chapter, the final Action I discuss is the practice of "writing home". As a means of reflecting upon one's self-location, positionality and own role in the cycle of *gift-reciprocity,* "writing home" enables us to assess our own relationship to this work and decide how we may move forward *in a good way*.

On *good* journeying

Throughout this project, I have referred to the practice of being *in a good way* as a means of actively working to support reconciliation and reconstruction. It is a teaching that has guided my intentional, embodied practices ever since and forms the basis of this project. Here, I will expand upon it slightly, as I intend to define what I perceive it means to be *in a good way*. Each day this past summer, I had several in-person classes at the First People's House at the University of Victoria, and at the doorway, there was a sign that had several phrases in SENĆOŦEN, lək̓ʷəŋən and English. One phrase that always caught my attention (in lək̓ʷəŋən) was *Nəẃ es šx*ʷ

cən ʔaẏ̓ šqʷeləqʷən, which means "bring in your good heart and mind". Later, I participated in a class where a master carver and Elder taught us how to carve paddles. One of the main things we discussed was being conscious of the energy we brought to the room, the energy we took, and the energy we shared, as they all would become imbued in our paddle. To not take care of ourselves, of that energy, was to compromise the paddle itself. Thus, it was the reminder at the door each morning – to bring in a good heart and mind – that encouraged me to be more self-reflective, more attentive, and more *intentional* in my practice.

Intentionality, as a recurring theme in this project, has often been employed in association with discussions on the everyday, embodied practices that support the building of *good* relations. By being *intentional,* we are encouraged to establish boundaries for ourselves, all while ensuring that those boundaries compel us to listen, to ask tough questions and reflect upon hard truths.[259] As established with the *gift-reciprocities* of the Choctaw and the Irish, it was a series of varied, embodied, individual and shared practices that most greatly supported the building of trust and *good* relations. If these practices are foundational to *good* relations, we may see that they codify a means of being that is inherently "good" in its *intention*. Being *in a good way* is not a phrase of my own creation – as a descriptor of *relationality*, it has been discussed by many individuals, communities and Nations and came in various forms.[260] Cree legal scholar Dr. Darcy Lindberg, in exploring some of these existent definitions, offers "to the Cree this is *miyo wicehtowin* (to have good relations), to the Sioux, *mitakuye oyasin* (all my relations), and to the Anishnaabek, *nikanisitook* (all my relatives in life)".[261] So too, could it be likened to the Nuu-Chah-Nulth's

[259] Tully, James. "On Gaia Citizenship: The Mastermind Lecture." *University of Victoria, April* 20 (2016).
[260] Lindberg, Darcy. "Miyo Pimâtisiwin and the Politics of Ignorance: Advancing Indigenous "Good Living" through Dismantling Our Mediated Relations." In *Wise Practices* (2021): 209.
[261] Ibid

own interpretation of relationality, *hishuk ish tsawalk* (everything is one).[262] All this is to say, that being *in a good way* must be considered in the context of a *relationality* with all those that surround us. It is a praxis bound by *interconnectivity*. For our purposes, I will thus look to it as a means of being whereby one recognizes their place in the interconnected web of *all our relations* and seeks to be in an everyday intentional, caring, conscious, reflective and holistic ethos. Being *in a good way* is thus in equal parts purposeful, loving, constructive, respectful and grateful in its daily function. Inherently, this means that it is also radically decolonial and purposeful in its approach – just as Asch has mentioned in his discussions on "robust resurgence", to be *in a good way* is to reflect on one's positionality within the settler-colonial framework and institutions, and *actively* work to resist, reshape and resolve it.[263] In the hopes of contributing to the understanding of being *in a good way*, this project has been dedicated to 1) seeing *all our relations* as *gifts*, and thus, the implications of such a modality of knowing, being and doing; 2) recognizing the importance of *reciprocity* as a complimentary action and practice for *gifting*; 3) looking to *gift-reciprocity relationships* as an *active* form of relationship-building that works to build upon collaborative, respectful and intentional narratives between Nations and 4) providing some examples of how one can turn these understandings into *actions*. If looking to the Choctaw Nation and the Irish's *gift-reciprocity relationship* is how we may be inspired to dance, then being *in a good way* is the way in which we may join hands and start to move together.

Action #1: Renew your Relations

Looking back to *Uachtarán na hÉireann* Mary Robinson's visit to the Choctaw Nation in 1995, we see her speech reflecting a critical understanding – that it was important for her to

[262] Atleo, Eugene Richard. *Principles of Tsawalk: An Indigenous Approach to Global Crisis*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011.
[263] Asch, Michael. "Back to the Future: Confederation Treaties and Reconciliation" in *Resurgence and reconciliation: Indigenous-settler relations and earth teachings*. Asch, Michael, John Borrows, and James Tully, eds. University of Toronto Press, 2018.

return to the Choctaw and *renew* her Nation's allyship, honouring their shared past and supporting a collaborative future. As I have noted, this *renewal* of relations represented a formal commitment to "completing the circle".[264] Yet, it is the ongoing nature of the relationship, as opposed to a final transactional exchange, that has been the impetus for this work. The circle may have been completed, but it is not at an end – it continues, a cyclical pattern of gifting, reciprocating and gratitude. In the context of Tully's *systematic interdepedence* that we associate with the equilibrium of the natural world, many examples of *renewal* could be looked to for connection. As I think of the natural cycles of wildfire that continue to impact many of us in my home province, I cannot help but consider the role that these powerful forces play in completing the circle, and thus, starting it all again. So too, could I return to the orchard worker, renewing their relations each season to care for the apple trees in *Secwepemcúl'ecw*. The *gift-reciprocity relationship* of the Choctaw Nation and the Irish exemplifies this pattern of *renewal* – through this return, in remembrance of their shared past, the Nations were empowered to build upon their history and set out directives and intentions for their future interactions. No doubt, this renewal is in some way responsible for all that was to come – from the scholarship programme to the Navajo gift in 2020.

As such, it is *renewal*, and thus, the ways it encourages us to *think relationally*, that I first wish to explore as a contributory action to being *in a good way*. In doing so and considering the Nation-to-Nation Relationships that this work has been based upon, it is the methodology of treaty-making from which *renewal* will be considered. In discussing the dynamics that govern treaty-making between many Nations, Brian Noble begins with a story shared to him by some of

[264] *Uachtarán na hÉireann* Mary Robinson in her address to the Choctaw Nation, Choctaw Tribal Complex, May 23rd, 1995.

his Piikani friends that explains their treaty relationship with the neighbouring Ktunaxa Nation.[265]

"As told to me, the defining situation took place one day some 200 years ago. A Ktunaxa hunting party was tracking a group of […] deer over the Rocky Mountain passes, bringing them into the hunting lands of the Piikani, and the borderlands of their peoples' two territories. The deer were moving, as deer do, through mountain valleys where there was good browsing food. The Ktunaxa party followed them, as hunters do. This way of hunting was responsive, attentive, moving with the animals, and full of respect […] [but] these usual practices were amplified, as the Ktunaxa had a special obligation in the blacktail deer ceremony, a practice that aided in hunting such deer. The gift of the blacktail deer was more than its flesh to become food for the Ktunaxa; it was also the powerful spirit in this medicine. Respect also meant following the medicine, as the hunting and the medicine worked together. The story continued, however, with a surprise turn that the Ktunaxa had not necessarily anticipated – an encounter with a Piikani hunting party moving through these same valleys. […][Upon recognition of their transgression] a lodge or tipi was set up for the two groups to meet and sort matters out, following ceremonial protocol. […] Acknowledging fully that they were now in Piikani hunting territory, the Ktunaxa went about setting right these relations with the Piikani. They proposed to transfer to the Piikani certain of the rights to the powerful medicine ceremony, the Blacktail Deer Dance, the very ceremony that animated the conditions of their following the deer. A ceremony was undertaken, the transfer of rights was made, and the Ktunaxa and Piikani to this day understand they both will follow and hunt these deer in what we might now see as this border territory of sharing the

[265] Noble, Brian. "Treaty ecologies: With persons, peoples, animals, and the land." *Resurgence and Reconciliation: Indigenous-Settler Relations and Earth Teachings* (2018): 315-342.

land, not merely sharing as peoples but sharing between peoples and all the natural beings in this border area."[266]

In reflecting on the relationalities between the Ktunaxa, the Deer and the Piikani, Noble notes that "this was a praxis of treaty [established] through ceremonial-material encounter among persons, animal-persons, animal collectives, and peoples' collectives".[267] That this praxis was established through a ceremonial encounter between Nations is what is integral here – through ceremony, Nations may come together, renew their obligations, and continue their relations.[268] On and again. As a form of *renewal* within the treaty relationship, the hunter Nations use the Blacktail Deer Ceremony to fulfill their obligations to the Deer Nation, continuing their relations again for the next hunt. Equally, the agreement has supported the Nations in sharing their lands (and thus, *relating* to one another) *in a good way*.

Treaty-making, as an intentional, active practice, must therefore be understood as dependent upon *renewal* – of the *relationality* between the parties and how they choose to honour it.[269] When these agreements hinge upon the life essence of all Nations, they incite a commitment to longevity in the preservation of, and commitment to, *good* partnerships. It is these *good* partnerships that Stark and Starblanket find "[ensure that] we are better positioned to see the continuity between past, present, and future while also recognizing tradition as dynamic, contingent, and context dependent." [270] Thus, it is at the intersection of tradition and *relational*

[266] Ibid
[267] Ibid
[268] Ibid; Simpson, Leanne. "Looking after Gdoo-naaganinaa: Precolonial Nishnaabeg diplomatic and treaty relationships." *Wicazo Sa Review* 23, no. 2 (2008): 29-42.
[269] Simpson, Leanne. "Looking after Gdoo-naaganinaa: Precolonial Nishnaabeg diplomatic and treaty relationships." *Wicazo Sa Review* 23, no. 2 (2008): 29-42.
[270] Starblanket, Gina & Stark, Heidi. "Towards a Relational Paradigm− Four Points for Consideration: Knowledge, Gender, Land, and Modernity" in Resurgence and reconciliation: Indigenous-settler relations and earth teachings. Asch, Michael, John Borrows, and James Tully, eds. University of Toronto Press, 2018.

continuity that *good* partnerships see their propagation. Through treaties, parties are bound together through a mutual understanding of their obligations to one another.[271] It is this notion of *obligation* that perpetuates the cyclic nature of such relationships. So integral is this obligation that it failing to meet it compromises the well-being of a people. In discussing *bimaadiziwin,* and thus, this cycle of well-being between Nations, Leanne Betasamaoke Simpson offers the example of Mnijikanming, the place where the Mississauga and fish clans would meet to renew their relations, stating that "Nishnaabeg people only fished at particular times of the year in certain locations. They only took as much as they needed and never wasted. They shared with other members of their families and communities, and they performed the appropriate ceremonies and rituals before beginning. To do otherwise would be to ignore their responsibilities to the fish nations and to jeopardize the health and wellness of the people"[272]. Through *renewal*, the Nishnaabeg could ensure that they honoured the perpetual balance, treating other Nations with respect and being *in a good way*. Thus, we may see that *renewal* is central to both 'knowing' relationships themselves and the maintenance of flux equilibrium within the interconnected web.[273] Kimmerer's story of the pecan grove elaborates upon this, noting:

"Our taking returns benefit to them in the circle of life making life, the chain of reciprocity. Living by the precepts of the Honorable Harvest—to take only what is given, to use it well, to be grateful for the gift, and to reciprocate the gift—is easy in a pecan grove. We reciprocate the gift by taking care of the grove, protecting it from harm, planting seeds so that new groves will shade the prairie and feed the squirrels".[274]

[271] Simpson, Leanne. "Looking after Gdoo-naaganinaa: Precolonial Nishnaabeg diplomatic and treaty relationships." *Wicazo Sa Review* 23, no. 2 (2008): 29-42.
[272] Ibid
[273] Ibid
[274] Kimmerer, Robin Wall. "The Council of Pecans". In *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed editions, 2013.

If we are to think of these treaties *relationally*, we are to understand that they are dependent upon all being party to the cycle of *renewal* in turn. *Renewal* represents a means of maintaining balance in relations – it presents an opportunity for parties to come together and return to the mutually-beneficial, *reciprocal* basis by which they joined hands in the first place. Then, and only then, can *life promote life* as we have seen. When Mary Robinson returned to visit the Choctaw Nation, they renewed their relations, enabling for a multi-dimensional after-effect of *good* impacts to result. In summary, *renewal* is thus an essential means by which parties maintain equilibrium within their relationality. From there, parties may continue this sacred cycle of *gift* and *reciprocity.*

As an Action for being *in a good way*, *renewal* encourages one to consider the existent relations they hold. From those considerations, they are empowered to meet their obligations to them when necessary. In the context of *seeing relationally*, actions of *renewal* recognize that obligations between beings exist and that through our debts to one another, we must treat one another with respect. In looking at the first story I shared, I offered an example of my returning to the graveyard in *Croabh Chomtarta* to renew my relations and consider my connection to the Land. Sewn into the soils of my feet were the energies of distant family members, and it was imperative that I treated the place, and thus, them, with respect. If we are to consider the relations we hold, be it with People, Nations, Land or Place, we understand the sacredness that exists. Further, we learn more about the influences and impacts we have on all that surrounds us, and where our practices may need to change.

Action #2: Express Gratitude

As I have stated, central to the *gift-reciprocity relationship* is the resultant expression and action of *gratitude* – it represents a meaningful acknowledgement of all the *gifts* given and *reciprocated*. Expressing *gratitude* supports one in passing on all their *good* feelings. When *good*

feelings are passed on, they spread amongst the interconnected web of relations, to the point where a culture itself is marked by such expressions of appreciation. To be appreciative and to express gratitude in these manners is to be *in a good way.* As Kimmerer noted, "the stories we choose to shape our behaviours have adaptive consequences"[275] – and in the case of expressing *gratitude* for *all our relations* this is no more evident than how many of the cyclical, *gift-reciprocity relations* between Nations have continued to incur positive impacts in a myriad of ways. Previously, I shared the story of the Irish gifting back to the Navajo and Hopi Nations in a time of crisis. Many of the contributors included comments expressing the intentions behind their gifts – as an expression of thanks and recognition of the Choctaw's support. Here, I feel it necessary to note that *gratitude*, in this instance, is more than just a vocal acknowledgement, or expression of appreciation, but rather, a resulting *action* that is contributory to being *in a good way*. Through this lens, we may come to see that this ethos is readily *active* in its operations – let us speak in verbs, just as much as we speak in nouns.

My intention behind discussing *gratitude* in a verb-based sense is associated with several teachings that have been shared with me over the years. I do so with care of course, but also, in recognition of the source of those teachings. They are teachings of the lands, the waters, and the skies. Places that exist in a *dynamic* state of "flux equilibrium" if you will. If we are looking at *gratitude* in the context of being *in a good way*, we must do so knowing that it has the power to imbue our interconnected web with *good* feelings and *emotionality.* We allow ourselves to be vulnerable to those around us, to share our care and appreciation for all that is given and received. In doing so, connections are built. We can look no further than to the Choctaw's

[275] Kimmerer, Robin Wall. "The Gift of Strawberries". In *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed editions, 2013. 34.

original *gift* for inspiration in this regard – the Choctaw felt solidarity with the experiences of the Irish throughout their traumatic hunger and displacement. They were compelled to *gift* their support, their emotions, and their understanding, to this faraway Nation. This action, inherently, was bound by *gratitude* – reflecting the Choctaw's own ways of knowing, being and doing in connection to the world around them. These actions take differing forms when practiced by different Nations, but it is the implications of being *vulnerable* that I feel a need to return to. In discussing the *Rotinonhsyón:ni* Nation ceremony of reciting the *Ohenton Karihwatehkwen*, Mohawk scholars Kahsto'sera'a Paulette Moore and Tehahenteh Frank Miller offer that "We establish reciprocity with other beings and in that sense, we acknowledge and accept our own vulnerability".[276] While this vulnerability opens the self to attack, it also serves as a means of understanding one's *social location*. Recognizing those *systematic interdependencies* that exist within the interconnected web helps us to understand how much value we receive from the land's gifts. It also encourages us to recognize the land's needs in turn. In the context of treaty relationships, we can then see where *gratitude*'s role lays. To Stark, it is the story of The Woman Who Married Beaver where this understanding can be drawn. In explaining how *vulnerability* invokes *gratitude*, she notes:

"The beavers offer themselves up to the Anishinaabe as food, and in exchange the Anishinaabe agree to return the bones of the beaver and make offerings so that the cycle can continue. […] Each time the Anishinaabe offer gifts to the beavers, the beavers in turn offer themselves by allowing their physical bodies to be trapped. When their bones are returned to the water, this treaty is renewed".[277]

[276] Miller, Tehahenteh Frank. "Gratitude as Ceremony: A Practical Guide to Decolonization." *Journal of Sustainability Education*18 (2018).
[277] Stark, Heidi. "Respect, responsibility, and renewal: The foundations of Anishinaabe treaty making with the United States and Canada." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 34, no. 2 (2010).

Where the Anishinaabe make their offerings, they express their gratitude, through *gift*, in *reciprocity* to the beavers. They share their *vulnerability*, too – so close are their relations, that they are founded in kinship.[278] They recognize the mutual reliance between the Nations. They come together for the benefit of all. Allow us then to recognize *gratitude*'s merit to being *in a good way.* When you express *gratitude*, you acknowledge the *gifts* you have received from the relations around you. When you *act* upon that expression, in *reciprocity*, you share your *vulnerabilities* with those around you, recognizing your social location and mutual reliance within the interconnected web of relations. Doing so enables a movement through the world that perpetuates "flux equilibrium" – a responsive ethos whereby the needs of all are responded to, for the benefit of all. *Qwa:qlis* has given me many gifts, and as such, I do my best to express my *gratitude*, and whenever I can, give back in *reciprocity.* The intentional, everyday practices of *gratitude* through expression are encompassed in ceremony by many Nations.[279] In many cases, it can come as a simple expression of thanks, murmured in honour of *all our relations,* to which Kimmerer finds that "[in] the silence that falls at the end of those words I listen, longing for the day when we can hear the land give thanks for the people in return". [280]

To be able to hear the land give its thanks in return, we are bound by our own linguistic connections to it. Earlier in this work, I mentioned my decision to only use the true names of specific places. To do so, I have often researched the Nations and their languages to whom the places are bound. By learning some of the Land's language, we are encouraged to find deeper connections to it. For the second Action of being *in a good way*, *gratitude* (giving thanks to the

[278] Ibid
[279] Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. "Indigenous resurgence and co-resistance." *Critical ethnic studies* 2, no. 2 (2016): 19-34.
[280] Kimmerer, Robin Wall. "Allegiance to Gratitude". In *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed editions, 2013. 107.

Land) represents an opportunity for one to better understand their connection to Land, Place and People. Often, as I have noted, places are named due to identifying features about them. Equally, in learning expressions of gratitude, one can build a connection with the Nation whose Land they are walking on. If we can take an opportunity to learn some of the local language and place names, we can begin to better understand the places we live. To re-learn to call a place by its true name, like the returning to *Tsutwecw*, is to come to know more about its identity and history.

Action #3: Story Listening (Learn to *Listen*)

As I mentioned, it was only recently that my own *listening* at *Qwa:qlis* enabled me to recognize the cacophony of land, water and place rhythms in unison. I must acknowledge that this is some of what I speculate Kimmerer meant in her commentary on different Nations' ceremonial *gratitude* practices – for giving thanks to all that surrounds them as a means of acknowledging the land's *gifts*. *Listening*, in general, means hearing information being expressed to you and internalizing it.[281] For the purposes of this project, and in the context of stories, *listening* is thus an opportunity to hear, process, and apply knowledge shared and *gifted*. In the context of being *in a good way*, *listening* is an opportunity to learn from other beings – if knowledge is shared with us, we may choose to *actively* listen and reflect upon it.

Turning back to the Choctaw – Irish *gift-reciprocity relationship*, we can recognize the role that *listening* has played in their relations, both historically and now. When the Irish cried for help, the Choctaw came to their aid. As they grew closer, the two Nations heard one another – giving aid in various forms, from presence at ceremonial events to political allegiances. As

[281] Blenkinsop, Sean, and Mark Fettes. "Land, language and listening: The transformations that can flow from acknowledging indigenous land." *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 54, no. 4 (2020): 1033-1046.; Frenette, Arielle. "Story-listening as methodology: a feminist case for unheard stories." *Gender, Place & Culture* (2023): 1-21.; McGloin, Colleen. "Listening to hear: Critical allies in Indigenous Studies." *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* 55, no. 2 (2015): 267-282.

discussed, being *in a good way* calls for one to engage in a series of embodied, everyday practices that perpetuate the systematic interdependence and flux equilibrium of the natural world to the best of their abilities. It is a more definitive form of *listening*, then, that separates *good* practices from normative ones. Such a form of *listening* must be in equal parts responsive, mindful, self-reflective, and reciprocal in its characterization.

Many scholars, both settler and Indigenous, have discussed this engaged, alternative form of *listening* in the context of decolonial praxis – some streams have articulated it as "political listening" (whereby existing, mutual trust-centric relationships are empowered to reconstruct whole communities around a shared ethos.[282] Such an ethos thus operates within a shared experience, need or political objective, working to build bridges amongst partners. Inherently, though, this terminology is far more Eurocentric in its design – if we are to approach it from a *storywork* perspective, as I have done in this project, it might be better defined as a form of "story listening".[283] Frenette articulates this *story listening* as a practice whereby the listener is attentive to the storyteller's pace (they respond to the energy variations of the story), they contribute without taking agency from the teller (through active self-reflection and awareness of discomfort), and experience the story *holistically* (they look at the overall message as a sum of individual, contributive parts).[284] This form of *listening* is thus a means of hearing and

[282] Appleby, Gabrielle, and Eddie Synot. "A First Nations voice: Institutionalising political listening." *Federal Law Review* 48, no. 4 (2020): 529-542.; Bassel, Leah. "Listening as solidarity." *The Politics of Listening: Possibilities and Challenges for Democratic Life* (2017): 71-87.; Walia, Harsha. "Moving beyond a politics of solidarity toward a practice of decolonization." *Organize* (2012): 240-253.
[283] Blenkinsop, Sean, and Mark Fettes. "Land, language and listening: The transformations that can flow from acknowledging indigenous land." *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 54, no. 4 (2020): 1033-1046.; Christensen, Julia, Christopher Cox, and Lisa Szabo-Jones, eds. *Activating the heart: Storytelling, knowledge sharing, and relationship*. Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 2018.; Frenette, Arielle. "Story-listening as methodology: a feminist case for unheard stories." *Gender, Place & Culture* (2023): 1-21.; Lawless, Elaine J. "Women's life stories and reciprocal ethnography as feminist and emergent." *Journal of Folklore Research* (1991): 35-60.
[284] Frenette, Arielle. "Story-listening as methodology: a feminist case for unheard stories." *Gender, Place & Culture* (2023): 1-21.

processing stories (and thus, teachings) both humbly and intentionally. *Listening* to stories in such a way enables one to approach their learning in a means that supports *all our relations*, equally. Styres notes the ways it operates in both an active and location-based sense – as a form of "journeying", whereby any *listening*, and subsequent responsive action, occurs with the support of effective internal deliberation of self, space and place.[285] If we consider the role that these overlapping, interconnected social and physical locations play within this *listening*, it is evident that *Land*, as a storyteller and giver of gifts to its own right, should play in such practices.

In discussing the Land's agency within the telling of stories, Kimmerer offers the example of plants, noting that "when Skywoman scattered her handful of seeds across Turtle Island, she was sowing sustenance for the body and also for the mind, emotion and spirit: she was leaving us teachers".[286] Her work as a botanist, coupled with her teachings as a writer, intertwine both scientific and story-methodologies. Plants have medicinal uses, but they also have stories to share.[287] They give us *gifts*, opening an opportunity to feel *gratitude* and thus, give back in *reciprocity*.[288] In considering the Land's stories, I am drawn back to consider the experience I shared of visiting a famine home in *Luimneach.* Those heavy feelings of sadness and loss that surrounded the site seemed to permeate deep within my being. They were hard to comprehend, yes – but they shared lessons to all of us. The same can be said for any number of locations of great physical, spiritual and emotional pain – the Choctaw storyteller Tim Tingle

[285] Styres, Sandra D. "Land as first teacher: A philosophical journeying." *Reflective Practice* 12, no. 6 (2011): 717-731.
[286] Kimmerer, Robin Wall. "Skywoman Falling". In *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed editions, 2013.
[287] Ibid
[288] Ibid

articulates it best in drawing comparisons to both the path of the Trail of Tears and famine-stricken regions of *Eire*.

"[To] uncover stones, to teach the untaught, to educate with feelings and living winds, the rain and the pain of cold and hunger, and for ghosts still thriving in our woods and mountains—and, as I would soon find out, ghosts thrive among the hills and valleys of Irish burial sites. Still they rest on tiny mounds of rising ground; still they surround those willing to listen."[289]

These "living winds" are not limited to the imagination – they are a scent on the breeze, a whisper in the grass, a weight on your shoulder, a rain droplet on your cheek. We experience, we feel, and we think. If the listener is *willing*, stories bring about understandings – they facilitate connection and *relationality* through individual and collective experience. For the Choctaw, "to listen" is *Haklo*.[290] Through *listening*, *relationality* is perpetuated. From the perspective of being *in a good way*, such *listening* is thus supportive of a 'transition' of sorts – it aids in the formation of one's own *relational* means of being.

As a third Action for being *in a good way*, the practice of *story listening* works as a means by which the *listener* can establish relations that are based in mutual respect, self-reflection, and action. To better understand *all our relations*, and thus, one's own place within the interconnected web, connections must be established upon soil that is well trodden by the soles of reflection. If relationships (be it at an individual, community, or Nation-to-Nation level) are built with such qualities as a foundational elements, one can understand that they can be so *in a*

[289] Tingle, Tim. "I Should Have Known". In *Famine Pots: The Choctaw–Irish Gift Exchange, 1847–Present*. Howe, LeAnne, and Padraig Kirwan, eds. MSU Press, 2020.
[290] Brown, Danica Love. "Our vision of health for future generations: An exploration of proximal and intermediary motivations with women of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma." PhD diss., Portland State University, 2019.

good way. As the recipient of a story *gift*, one is encouraged to reflect upon their own relation to a story and its teachings. If one wishes to be *in a good way*, they could do well to practice this *listening* – for understanding one's social location and role in making change calls for other voices to ring out. As such, *story listening* is also a means of making space – for other stories to be shared, heard and responded to.

Action #4: Writing Home (Learn Your Story)

A final action for being *in a good way*, as received from the *gift-reciprocity relationships* that I have discussed, holds a distinct connection to this project – but allow me to explain. As established earlier in this work, *seeing all our relations* as *gifts* perpetuates a means of being that is *relational* in its intention – when we give *gifts* of relationship, we understand that they will return to us in *reciprocity*, and so on.[291] When we express *gratitude* (in both active and passive sense), we offer an invitation to *interconnectivity*. Meeting this praxis calls for a critical self-reflection – it demands for the beholder to be active in the work, through daily, embodied and *intentional* practice. Through this project, the main means by which I have based my research has been through the sharing, analysis and reflection upon *stories*. As I have established, *storywork*, as a methodology, enables the researcher to contend with the voices of a multiplicity of perspectives, drawing out connections and applications. For this project, it has meant that the stories of two sovereign, yet interconnected Nations have been explored, elaborating upon their ongoing Nation-to-Nation relationship, and working to understand the basis for which their *reciprocal* relationship has been renewed time and again. It is with these considerations that I thus meet my final action gleaned from the *gift-reciprocity relationship* and contributor to being

[291] Kimmerer, Robin Wall. "Returning the Gift". In *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed editions, 2013.

in a good way. When reflecting upon the role that *stories* play in the foundation of *relational* ways of being, Smith offers the following quote.

"Stories remind us of who we are and of our belonging. […] [They] hold within them knowledges while simultaneously signifying relationships, […] are active agents within a relational world, […] [and] tie us with our past and provide a basis for continuity with future generations."[292]

This process of self-reflection, coupled with a commitment to *listening* and *learning* in equal ways, is much of the basis for the critical decolonial process known as *writing home*. As articulated by Nina Asher, *writing home* is a means of decolonizing the self as well as "[a] commitment to transformation [in social and educational contexts]".[293] Through *writing home,* one is encouraged to consider the multiplicity of implications they have within the colonial apparatus – all while wrestling with their active and passive roles in the perpetuation of colonial forces. It is from *writing home*'s *storying* work that Asher finds "[we] can then occupy the sites of knowledge, memory, and self that we evacuated for reasons perhaps we did not even know or begin to understand".[294] Thus, by *writing home,* one is encouraged to *actively* look at their relations through a critical, self-reflective lens.

The process of *writing home* is thus a means of looking to one's own history, reflecting upon their relationship to colonialism, and intentionally working to dismantle their role in its function. As I have offered here, much of this work can occur through everyday embodied practices that contribute to the means of being that is *in a good way*. Within the context of this

[292] Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021.
[293] Asher, Nina. "Writing home/decolonizing text (s)." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 30, no. 1 (2009): 1-13.
[294] Ibid

project, I have chosen to do so through a reflection on a multiplicity of identities, and thus, personal histories – of which I have included my *own*. From a personal standpoint, this work has thus been an exercise in what Smith calls "coming to know the past", which has facilitated the researcher in studying "alternative histories" of the self for *"*[forming] the basis of alternative ways of doing things".[295] Through working in these alternative ways, we may transform the way we view our history, and thus, acquire an opportunity to act upon that history to change the future. Smith, in acknowledging the potential for future impacts, notes that *writing home* is thus a means to "get past binaries of self and other, colonizer and colonized".[296] The intention here is not to perpetuate the homogeneity of cultures but to move past systematic *othering* from both individual and collective standpoints – in league with the teachings of Leanne Simpson, it is to look at the world *relationally*, to find a connection in shared difference, and *celebrate* that difference. [297]

My intention in sharing some short stories and personal anecdotes here was to do my own form of *writing home*, by reflecting on my own multiplicity of identities, all while approaching the Choctaw–Irish *gift-reciprocity relationship* from a *storywork* methodology. As an Irish citizen, I have spent time learning more about my family's history, culture and relationships to Land, place and beings. Through that reflection, I learned about the Irish connection to the Choctaw Nation – through their sacred *gift* of relationship, solidarity was born. Through that solidarity, the two Nations have incurred positive impacts that have spread across the interconnected web of relations, resulting in instances of aid that have saved lives, built

[295] Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021.
[296] Ibid
[297] Simpson, Leanne. "Looking after Gdoo-naaganinaa: Precolonial Nishnaabeg diplomatic and treaty relationships." *Wicazo Sa Review* 23, no. 2 (2008): 29-42.

connection, and honoured each other, time and again. The inquiry into their history has supported me in learning more about the Choctaw Nation, about their practices of *Ima* and *Iyyi Kowa,* and how their ways of knowing, being and doing facilitated this aid to the Irish during the dark times of *an Gorta Mór.* For the Choctaw, it was the individual and collective memory of *hunger*, *displacement,* and loss, experienced upon their removal during the Trail of Tears, that encouraged them to reach out and offer a hand in solidarity, across the Atlantic. Yet, it was also a reflection of the Choctaw themselves – for to be Choctaw is to give and give on. The Irish, to their own right, had experienced a relationship to colonialism, as their relationship to the Crown and its impositions had resulted in centuries, of bloodshed, poverty and assimilation on their lands. From a personal standpoint, learning about these histories through an explorative lens has supported deeper meanings to history, memory, and knowledge equally. As I have discussed, this *storywork* is informed by experiences I have had while living, travelling, and learning in *Eire.* However, it has also been informed by experiences grappling with this aspect of my identity while here in Canada, where my other identity, as an uninvited visitor calling *Secwépemcúl'ecw* home, exist. As an uninvited visitor, I have come to learn about how my own experiences are a result of my own social location and positionality within the settler colonial apparatus. Inherently, I have *benefitted* from this apparatus – and in many ways, I continue to do so.

Despite this, I hope that in doing this reflection and embracing these lessons, I can demonstrate some of the steps we can all take in this ongoing, never-ending process of being *in a good way.* As the final Action for being *in a good way*, *writing home* represents an opportunity for deep learning, understanding and reflection. Through *writing home*, one is encouraged to consider their connectivity to the relations around them. Where did they come from? Who are the Indigenous Nation to that land, or the one they are standing on? When we *write home*, we open

ourselves up to a vulnerability – perhaps, we may come to recognize where errors have been made along the way, or where they continue to be made. But doing so equally opens us up to the possibility of connection. To see the *relationality* of this life as a *gift*, to express *gratitude*, and to give on in *reciprocity*. To embrace the principles of *meitheal* and *iyyi kowa* – recognizing that *gifting* support builds community. To *understand* that those *gifts* will be *reciprocated*, and on again, conferring a growing meaning upon *all our relations*.

All these knowledges perpetuate the *gift-reciprocity relationship*. Through finding inspiration from the Choctaw–Irish *gift-reciprocity relationship*, contributory elements of being *in a good way* can be found – through acts of *renewal*, relationships can be built upon, and *flux equilibrium* can be maintained. As we recognize our place within the cycle of *gift-reciprocity*, we feel, we see, we hear, and we *know*. We express *gratitude*, giving thanks for the interconnectivities that surround us. And, through that cycle, we may practice *story listening,* making space for a multiplicity of voices and perspectives, reconciling many forms of knowing, being and doing, perpetuating *relationality.* Through intentional, embodied, active practices, such as *writing home*, we learn to reflect upon *stories* – some *gifted*, some *reciprocated* - as teachers to make change, for all those who came before us, and all those yet to come. With this journeying across this great curve of time, we learn what it means to be *in a good way*. And as the great cycle continues with these independent rhythms, these differences of tone and pace, the cacophony of mutually reinforcing melodies ring out. Our hands meet, our feet move, and we begin to dance *again*.

The End.

Epilogue

Thank you for the frost on the sand as we run down to seconds, the winter waves breaking at *Qwa:qlis*.

Thank you for the moment of peace, sitting in the surf, watching the sun set out over the distant *Mhaigh Eo*, as the final seams of light streak across *Binn Ghulbain*

Thank you for the golden streaks on the mountains each fall in *Secwepemcúl̓ecw*.

Thank you for the sunrise on a crisp *Glas Naíon* morning, the city's rhythms and tones speaking a thousand tales.

Thank you for sharing your good feelings with me, up on that hill in *Croabh Chomtarta*, each time I return.

Thank you for the home you have given me, surrounded by the land's fruits, in *Sxwetsméllp.*

Thank you for the circle of reciprocity that is this life.

But above all, thank *you*.

For today.

- Ethan Connor Quilty, *xʷməθkʷəy̓ əm land*, December 2023.

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