

Kiyosewin

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

The main objective of this research is to provide Indigenous nations and communities with practical solutions to strengthen their nationhood and contribute to community health through the praxis of hunting and land-based practices. Additionally, this project intends to provide a greater understanding of the importance of hunting and eating local healthy foods, and to facilitate a deeper understanding of the connections of Indigenous peoples with their land-base. More specifically, I have worked with my community, the Muscowpetung Saulteaux First Nation, to hunt and harvest our own foods to ensure a healthy diet is optional to community members, while examining other similar food sovereignty projects that other Indigenous nations have initiated. This work examines who the ‘hunter’ is and what responsibilities they invoke for community.

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## DEDICATION

First and foremost, I would like to thank gitchi-manitou, the Creator and great spirit for guiding my life and research. This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter Michaela ‘Waseekun’ Keepness and my family that has passed on while studying for my PhD: my late mother, Sherry Keepness, my late brother Michael Keepness, and my late sister Amy Keepness. I miss you all very much every day. I would also like thank my partner, Alexandra Fontaine for always supporting me throughout my journey. I would like to thank my father, Darwin Keepness and my little sister Jade Keepness for always supporting me. I would like to thank my grandmother Isabelle Stonechild for her wisdom and love. I would like to thank my community, the Muscowpetung First Nation for always supporting me in my education journey. I would also like to thank my PhD committee: Dr. Corntassel, Dr. Tengan, and Dr. Goodyear-Ka’opua—gitchi miigwech, I couldn’t have done it without you all!

## Introduction

The main objective of this research is to provide Indigenous nations and communities with practical solutions to strengthen their nationhood and contribute to community health through the praxis of hunting and land-based practices. Additionally, this project intends to provide a greater understanding of the importance of hunting and eating local healthy foods, and to facilitate a deeper understanding of the connections of Indigenous peoples with their land-base. More specifically, I have worked with my community, the Muscowpetung Sauteaux First Nation, to hunt and harvest our own foods to ensure a healthy diet is optional to community members, while examining other similar food sovereignty projects that other Indigenous nations have initiated. Ultimately, I believe that there is a high correlation between participating in land-based practices, such as hunting, and improvements to community health, such as a diabetes prevention program, which will be discussed more in-depth in a later chapter.

The community hunting project, which is the subject of this research, was created three years ago within Muscowpetung First Nation. Unfortunately, it was put on hold this past year because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our first organized community hunt was in Wood Mountain, Saskatchewan, in the fall of 2018, and since that time we decided to keep this hunting group active with about 15 youth. What led us to start this hunting group was that we wanted to ensure that we were mentoring newer hunters in our community. Our first hunt was a success, and we had gotten the interest of surrounding communities to send their youth so that they too could learn. After we had finished our first hunt, everyone was in agreement that we should continue on with this group, and we are planning to hunt again in Moose Mountain on August 27, 2022. In the Sauteaux culture, *Kiyosewin* translates to ‘big game hunter’ in the Sauteaux language. When considering the steps to becoming a big game hunter which includes learning how to hunt respectfully, understanding the oral history of why we still hunt (which has its roots in creation stories), taking on responsibility for your community, and to providing your community with *choice* when it comes to food. In my opinion, being an Indigenous hunter is

learning these things and accepting the responsibility—the action of giving back food to your community is partaking in reciprocity, which is very different than sport hunting. We do not hunt for ourselves, or the trophy rack that can be seen in countless living rooms across Turtle Island, we hunt to provide and take care of our community in practical ways and for the future health and well-being of our community as well as the animal nations themselves.

Our hunting group was originally established to mentor younger hunters in our community while providing our nation with harvested game. This community project covers several areas including health, diabetes prevention, gender, hunting, roles and responsibilities, and Indigenous stories and experiences, which I will explore in more detail in subsequent chapters. In the later chapters, I have interviewed hunters from across Turtle Island to get a sense of what their ‘Indigenous hunting’ practices entail and compare and contrast Indigenous practices to sport hunting in general. Researching is one thing, but mobilizing an entire community through planning, organizing, securing funding, hunting, all while researching is an important way of embodying and enacting the ideas that I’m writing about. I would also like to acknowledge that I have written several proposals that have helped with the funding from Jordan’s Principle, which supported our hunting camps and has allowed us to travel as a community.

### **Research Question(s)**

There are several overarching themes that I touch on throughout the dissertation. Firstly, the overarching question that will be guiding the research: *in what ways can land-based praxis, and pedagogy enhance and positively impact community well-being, health, and cultural continuity?* We will look at the cultural practices of hunting and see how relational responsibilities are utilized in these initiatives. Which leads me to the second overarching question, *how can land-based practices destabilize colonial-imposed ‘roles’ and expectations of gender?* Finally, I pose the question, *how is Indigenous hunting different than sport hunting?* Because there is such sparse literature on

Indigenous hunting, I intended to focus on how Indigenous hunting is different in all its processes, from preparation to the practical acts of respect such as putting down tobacco. In a later chapter, I conduct a literature review on hunting and related aspects of health and land-based practices. I also share a literature review in chapter 3 that focuses on gender and land-based practices. While working with Muscowpetung, the leadership had asked me to compile diabetes statistics in our community. This led to the health research aspect of this project which tries to mitigate the type II diabetes rates. The Muscowpetung leadership had agreed that I could write proposals, organize our hunting group, but I had to keep statistics and health indicators for the years that I would be contributing. During this time, I have written several successful proposals that aided us in our hunting trips and allowed us to gather our health statistics. I believe that researching in Indigenous communities is founded on respect and reciprocity. Because the leadership has allowed me to do research in the community, they had wanted to utilize my ability to gather statistics and produce graphs of our demographics for their record keeping. Thus, though this project could have focused on just responsibilities, land-based connection, and empowerment, the Muscowpetung leadership had asked me to also focus on community health.

### **Rez Hunters**

As part of our ongoing community hunting project, Muscowpetung First Nation and its community members will be organizing, planning, and being strategic with our community resources to provide our community members with an alternative source of foods. We will be training and mentoring hunting groups to harvest and jar local foods. This hunting group will consist of older hunters and younger youth to be mentored by the older hunters. For the first few years we had girls and boys that wanted to participate, as we continued, there are mostly boys who want to participate. The youth do not go out and hunt or handle firearms, they are taught how to properly clean the animals, and the acts of putting down tobacco after a successful hunt. In the meantime, they are

taught to pick medicines, set up tipis, and other activities through the day.

This community mentorship will also attempt to destabilize hegemonic masculinities and ideologies around hunting (land-based practices), be respective of gender, and ultimately, have a better understanding of community responsibilities. We hope to provide this education and training through our hunting group which will mentor young hunters by more senior hunters to understand that our community comes from women hunters (Elsie Gambler) and that women and two-spirit people can also take on this responsibility. Zapotec scholar Isabel Altamarino-Jiménez states that “hunting and, to a lesser extent, fishing have been masculinized, scholars have shown that Indigenous women are extremely involved in these activities through specific tasks that ensure the productive acquisition of game and fish”<sup>1</sup> From previous hunts, we ensured that there were young people in attendance to learn how to safely hunt, respect the animal, and learn other protocols with hunting from the older hunters. According to my own genealogy, my father’s hunting mentor was Elsie Gambler (his grandmother), who taught him to hunt, trap, and be self-sufficient. I believe that acknowledging this is an important initial step in destabilizing hegemonic masculinities around hunting, responsibilities, and gender.

Overall, cultural practices, such as hunting undertaken by Indigenous community members contribute meaningfully to the community’s health and wellness. Additionally, I look at sport hunting and how it contrasts to Indigenous hunting. There are several spiritual undercurrents that need to be explored when understanding Indigenous hunting and the very process itself. In this project, I will also explore the ceremonial and traditional understandings of hunting in the prairies - what it means, where it originated, its roots in oral history, and its significance in more contemporary times. I interview several Indigenous male/female/two-spirit hunters and get their feedback on roles,

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<sup>1</sup> Altamarino-Jiménez, *Indigenous Encounters with Neoliberalism*, 81

responsibilities, gender, and stories. The hunting process involves the entire community. It is not just individuals who go out to hunt and track. Hunting also involves individuals who prepare hunters to go out on their hunting journey. For a lot of Plains tribes, a sweat lodge ceremony was usually conducted before a hunt to pray to the animal's spirit, so that it would be a successful hunt. Thereafter, when the hunters would bring back their harvest, individuals would help clean the animal, others would help with tanning the hide and others would help pack and prepare meats. All of these individuals who partake in the process of hunting are part of the hunt, and their labor is rewarded with food. In the fall, we continue to do a 'food-drive' at our local health center to provide families with local foods so that they have healthy food choices throughout the winter months. This work will also look at labor and gender in the community and highlight how those who identify as either a man, woman, and/or queer- gendered individuals are providing for their communities in unique ways (see chapter 3). We will focus on the importance of land-based practices and determine the positive influences they have in Indigenous communities, in practical, and theoretical ways: how land-pedagogy contributes to ones learning on the land, the consumption of healthy foods, and the many other narratives that happen when one is constantly on the land.

Indigenous resurgence is a paradigm that consists of real people in real communities that use whatever means necessary to liberate from their oppressive situations and health conditions.

Resurgence has a long history, but the literature starts with a focus on processes of reconnecting with land, culture and community. Jeff Corntassel and Cheryl Bryce state that “whether living in rural or urban areas, Indigenous peoples are finding new pathways to resurgence and cultural continuity in order to strengthen their nations amidst ongoing colonialism and legacies of cultural harm.”<sup>2</sup>

Anishinaabe scholar Leanne Simpson adds “resurgence must be concerned with the reattachment of our minds, bodies, and spirits to the networks of relationships and ethical practices that generated

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<sup>2</sup> Corntassel, Bryce, “Practicing Sustainable Self-Determination,” 157.

grounded normativity. It means the reattachment of our bodies to our lands, regardless of whether those lands are rural, reserves, or urban.”<sup>3</sup>

Anishinaabe legal scholar John Borrows was one of the first Indigenous writers to invoke the term resurgence in his 2002 book *Recovering Canada: The Resurgence of Indigenous Law*. Jeff Corntassel adds “an Indigenous resurgence paradigm reframes decolonization by turning away from the state in order to focus more fully on the complex interrelationships between Indigenous nationhood, placed-based, relationships, and community-centered practices that reinvigorate everyday acts of renewal and regeneration.”<sup>4</sup> For me, resurgence entails raising healthy children and communities through the regeneration of our food systems and hunting practices. Another resurgent aspect of this project is highlighting how we are still nurturing the relationships and responsibilities that have been demonstrated by previous ancestors to ensure a sustainable livelihood. We hope to be an example for surrounding communities in the Plains, showing what can happen when communities are mobilized to engage in land-based practices. We will also be looking at land-based mentorship and land-pedagogy and how they serve as a foundation for learning about ourselves, our land, and culture. In essence, we are a band of ‘Rez hunters’ trying our best to look after our community, the way we have been taught since we were kids.

### **Self-Location**

I share many stories throughout this dissertation of my young experience with hunting. I identify as a cis-hetero male that was raised on the Muscowpetung First Nation. Though we call ourselves Saulteaux, my family has Cree and Saulteaux roots on my father’s side, and Dakota and Lakota on my mother’s side. Even though I identify as Saulteaux, I pull information from Saulteaux and Cree cosmology because that is how I was raised. At the age of 19, I mentored under Nehiyaw

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<sup>3</sup> Simpson, *As We have Always Done*, 44

<sup>4</sup> Corntassel, “Life Beyond the State,” 73

elder Barry Ahenakew who I interview in this dissertation. It was his Nehiyaw teachings that opened my eyes to the history the Cree and the Saulteaux people come from. He has told me stories of ancient times, before the Great Flood, of how Cree and Saulteaux people existed. At one point in time, the Cree and the Saulteaux people were one. In modern times, we share a similar language that stems from the Algonquin language group. I have made it my personal mission to become fluent in both Cree and Saulteaux as I had to learn to understand Cree while being mentored under Barry Ahenakew. Through the process of over 10 years, I have been an Oskapewis (helper) in his chicken dance lodge, horse dance lodge, and ghost dance lodge. It was at these locations where I learned that we come from a people that have eons of history that will likely never be fully a part of Western Academia. Thus, I call upon Nehiyaw and Anishnaabeg teachings and philosophies throughout this dissertation.

I became a hunter because my father hunted all his life to provide for our family. I remember as a young child, eating deer meat, potatoes, and onions, and getting excited when my father and my uncles would come back after a successful hunt. They would teach me how to hold the deer and learn how to clean it and prepare it. I am fortunate that I was mentored at the age of 10 to safely handle firearms and hunt small game, and then advanced on to larger animals in my adolescence. Hunting and being on the land are something that I look forward to every year, and I touch on the importance of its healing properties and how it does a ‘reset’ on the body and mind. This past hunting season was critical for my body and mind, as we had been ‘cooped up’ due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, where I literally isolated myself, I had very little social engagement with my family and friends, and the land itself. It was in late August when we had gone on our elk hunt, where I started to feel normal again. I was waking up with the sun and going to bed with the sun, I was eating properly, and in the moment, it just felt right and reminded me of the importance of the land’s healing properties. I reflected on how important it was for Indigenous peoples to experience this, and yet, prior to European contact, there was very little noted history of diseases or ill health—

perhaps it can be attributed to the amount of time they were living and being on the land. I can tell that many other hunters in my community and surrounding communities had reflected on how important it was for us as hunters to gather harvested meat for our communities in the event of a lockdown. Fortunately, we were able to feed our community with elk meat and bison meat and provided it to our members on-reserve and off-reserve. In a later chapter, I explore the rewards and benefits of being a community hunter, one that provides for their community and the empowering experience that that is. For now, I had just wanted to share that I write from a reflexive autoethnographic lens that encompasses not only my experience, but other Indigenous hunters. Nehiyaw/Saulteaux scholar Margaret Kovach adds “autoethnography, an approach with its foundation in ethnographical research, brings together the study of self (auto) in relation to culture (ethnography). Within this approach, self-reflection moves beyond field notes to having a more integral positioning within the research process and the construction of knowledge itself.”<sup>5</sup> I find myself writing about my own personal stories with hunting, and sharing other stories of other Indigenous hunting, I find that autoethnography gives me the ability to do that.

### **Interviews**

The interviews throughout my dissertation have either been in person, over the campfire, or through email when the COVID-19 pandemic began. I have interviewed 12 Indigenous land-based practitioners all throughout Turtle Island to get a better understanding of how land-based practices can influence individual and community health from their respective territories. I have interviewed hunters/land-based practitioners who identify as male, female, and two-spirited. When I interviewed some of the ‘rez hunters’ it was during our hunting trips, on our hike back from a successful hunt, or in the truck when we were setting up for the evening—these ‘rez hunters’ are members of the Muscowpetung First Nation.

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<sup>5</sup> Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, 33.

Undertaking this research during a global pandemic has been challenging. I was able to modify my research methods to gather information despite Government mandates to isolate and not have human contact. Since the University of Victoria also did not want us interviewing individuals in person, I utilized email interactions for Isaiah Gilson's, Daryl Lucero's, Jordyn Burnouf and Shana Pasapa's interviews it was done through email. These interviews were permissible based on the the guidelines of the human research ethics committee at the University of Victoria.

For some of the longer interviews, I was able to hold, in person conversations that I have had with Elders, and hunters, often, in informal situations such as around a campfire or walking back from a successful hunt. I often use a reflexive autoethnographic style throughout this dissertation because I am thinking and reflecting on how to get more information and knowledge from these Indigenous hunters. During these interviews, the methodology of storytelling is being used by the interviewer and the interviewee. In most cases, these are longer conversations that I have had to shorten and have had to sift through the collected data. In the conversations with Barry Ahenakew, we frequently talk in Cree and switch to English, but for the purposes of this dissertation I have translated to English.

Some of the interviews conducted with the hunters were chosen from varying locations have been observed through social media, and more specifically, Instagram. I noted Jordyn Burnouf and Shana Pasapa were female hunters that I wanted to highlight and interview. For Isaiah Gilson and Daryl Lucero, I noted that they are in very different geographical locations such as the Yukon and Isleta, New Mexico. I had wanted to know how they differed from our 'rez hunters' group in terms of geography, how they hunted, and what they hunted. I also interviewed Andre Bear who identifies as two-spirit and hunts. I had wanted to get his perspective to provide an intersectional analysis on gender and labor. I believe that these differences can shed light on hunting and community mobilization, which our rez hunter group can also learn from.

## Research Methodologies

According to Metis scholar Adam Gaudry, “the fundamental goal of insurgent research is to create space for the self-determination and empowerment of Indigenous peoples.”<sup>6</sup> We will try to give the communities the tools they need to empower themselves and determine how they want to achieve their land-based praxis. This links up with Corntassel’s concept of *everyday acts of resurgence*, where “by focusing on ‘everyday’ acts of resurgence, one disrupts the colonial physical, social and political boundaries designed to impede our actions to restore our nationhood.”<sup>7</sup> Corntassel and Hardbarger add that “everyday acts of resurgence also gives us a deeper understanding of gendered relationships and how they drive resurgence movements. By focusing on intimacy and gendered relationships within an everyday context, our understandings of community resurgence and nationhood are deepened.”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, “focusing on everydayness helps make visible the often unseen or unacknowledged actions that embody Indigenous nationhood.”<sup>9</sup> In this research project, insurgent education and everydayness is part of the community-centered methodologies I utilize. Ultimately, then, “Indigenous methodologies are guided by tribal epistemologies, and tribal knowledge is not Western knowledge.”<sup>10</sup>

This research project is designed to promote cultural continuity and practical solutions to improve Indigenous health issues which can be developed and implemented at the community level. By focusing on Indigenous hunting practices, we are providing examples how Indigenous communities can partake in community planning, organizing, and mentorship of youth with Knowledge Keepers to ensure that they are involved with harvesting and hunting local sustenance. In our community, everydayness means always being outside and working. I grew up watching my

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<sup>6</sup> Gaudry, “Researching the Resurgence,” 256.

<sup>7</sup> Corntassel, “Reinvisioning Resurgence”, 88.

<sup>8</sup> Corntassel and Hardbarger, “Educate to perpetuate”

<sup>9</sup> Corntassel et. al, “Introduction,” 17.

<sup>10</sup> Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, 30.

now, 90-year-old grandmother work every day, whether it was gardening, picking berries, or canning foods, she was always outside keeping busy. In fact, she still does a lot of land-based practices even at 90 years old! It was commonplace in my community to hunt and gather on my reserve in the fall months to prepare for the winter.

Indigenous land-based projects are decolonization in praxis; when we engage with our land-base we are reconnecting to relationships and enacting land-based pedagogies that have been foundational for our survival as Indigenous nations. According to Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, “[d]ecolonization must offer a language of possibility, a way out of colonialism.”<sup>11</sup> We are trying to decolonize our hunting (and who the hunter is) and expectations of community labor. In chapter 1, I will be exploring research projects where the authors have sought to transcend their colonial situations and provide community-based solutions to empower their nations to give us insight into our hunting and health project. Whether they are focusing on the harvesting of wild rice or are researching contamination of waterways, Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers are taking theory and turning it into action.

Furthermore, for a point of comparison, I also look to a group of Indigenous hunters in Northern Siberia that I studied while learning about Indigenous hunting philosophies and practices—the reasoning for this is that there are very few research projects involving hunting and Indigenous communities. This particular group is an autonomous community without Russian influence and live according to their Indigenous cosmology. I found this group unique in that their hunting practices were true to their culture without colonial influence over the years. I will explore how Indigenous land-based research projects provide potential solutions for their communities to strengthen Indigenous nationhood. We explore *place*, and how it relates as a method to relational accountability and research. We will look at Corntassel’s *Everyday Acts of Resurgence* and see how it can be

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<sup>11</sup> Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 204.

incorporated at a community level. Stemming from ‘everyday acts of resurgence’ is the *body*, which is essential in any research project or community movement. From a Hawaiian context, we need to have a deeper understanding of our *kuleana* (responsibility) to our land-base as Indigenous people and as researchers, I explore *responsibility* in a later chapter. Whether it is a research project or everyday actions, reconnecting with our land is an important aspect of land-based pedagogy—a method of learning from the land that has been serving Indigenous people since time immemorial.

When discussing land-based cultural practices, firstly, we must understand the significance of *place*. I argue that Indigenous societies all over the world view place very differently than settler society. Keith Basso states, “for what people make of their place is closely connected to what they make of themselves as members of society and inhabitants of the earth.”<sup>12</sup> If we were to examine the timeline of place since colonization, we would see that there have been many changes to lands, waterways, airways, and ecosystems – allowing one to research the difference between place in a *temporal sense*. Several Indigenous nation’s creation stories often involve their *place* in which they currently reside. Place invokes story, memory, culture, survival, perseverance and a way to transcend colonialism. Apache Elder Annie Peaches states, “the land is always talking to people. The land makes people live right. The land looks after us. The land looks after people.”<sup>13</sup> *Because the land looks after us, we must be accountable and reciprocate it back*. From an Apache context, Basso talks about the significance of telling stories about the Navajo nation’s history. Basso states, “nothing is more basic to the telling of a Western Apache story than identifying the geographical locations at which events in the story unfold.”<sup>14</sup> Place also serves as an axiom of Indigeneity, it lets us know *who we are and who we come to be*: “places possess a marked capacity for triggering acts of self-

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<sup>12</sup> Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 86.

reflection, inspiring thoughts about who one presently is, or memories of who one used to be, or musings on who one might become.”<sup>15</sup> Place also serves as a pedagogy for one’s *collective memory*, which can be called upon by community members. Dudley, in a conversation with Basso, states, “Wisdom sits in places. It’s like water that never dries up. You need to drink water to stay live, don’t you? Well, you also need to drink from places. You must remember everything about them. You must learn their names. You must remember what happened at them long ago.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, place (and land) also serves as a pedagogy for Indigenous nationhood and Indigenous governance. Additionally, *story carries place*. Unanga scholar Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie state, “stories thus carry out a labor; creating, maintaining, and/or shifting narratives about the places in which we live and how they produce us and us them.”<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, then, land is a multiplicity of meaning according to its subjectivity. For example, Tuck and McKenzie add, “to practice place or land productively towards version of critical Indigenous and environmental politics will mean different things to different people and communities.”<sup>18</sup> Indigenous people have a deeper understanding of place in contrast to settler society. Tuck and McKenzie state, “Indigenous philosophies of place represent significant epistemological and ontological departures from those that have emerged in Western frames.”<sup>19</sup> Because Indigenous societies view place in meaningful ways, by this method, they become relationally accountable to their land-base. From a perspective of research, Swampy Cree scholar Shawn Wilson states, “Relational accountability requires me to form a reciprocal and respectful relationships with the communities where I am conducting research.”<sup>20</sup> Wilson also adds that “Research must use relational accountability, that is, must be connected to or a part of a

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 127.

<sup>17</sup> Tuck and McKenzie, *Place in Research*, 43.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>20</sup> Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 40.

community (set of relationships).”<sup>21</sup> Conducting research in an Indigenous community cannot be done without relationships. The researcher has relationships with not only the people of the community, but the land, waterways, and animal life; The researcher uses these methods of story, community, and place, to gather information and insight—that ensures relational accountability and reciprocity.

The research methodologies above ensure there is relational accountability in Indigenous communities. Additionally, I would also like to talk about the importance of *community mobilization*. This project seeks to not just interview one or a few people, but seeks to mobilize a whole community to go camping, hunting, and garden. This is an example of Participatory Action Research. Even Tuck and Marcia McKenzie believe “community-based participatory research refers to participatory action research that is entered on issues of broad interest to community and often entails forms of community consultation, for example, in relation to land use, public health, or other policy-related issues.”<sup>22</sup> How can one ‘researcher’ mobilize a community? I believe that this gives rise to why I wanted to focus on Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s binary of the insider/outsider, as it relates to research. Because I self-identify as an ‘insider,’ though, that is up to my community to determine. I feel that I need to write from a reflexive and autoethnographical lens to really share my experience and research with Indigenous hunting and hunters. In my analysis, I try to be objective as possible, and ultimately, I just try and be an echo chamber for other Indigenous hunters’ experiences. By extension, Nehiyaw and Saulteaux scholar Margeret Kovach states, “Autoethnography, an approach with its foundations in ethnographical research, brings together the study of self (auto) in relation to culture (ethnography). Within this approach, self-reflection moves beyond field notes to having a more integral positioning within the research process and the construction of knowledge itself.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 41-42.

<sup>22</sup> Tuck and McKenzie, *Theory, Methodology, and Methods*, 88

<sup>23</sup> Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, 33.

Because we are mobilizing a community through action and research, according to Linda Tuhiwai Smith, “Community action approaches assume that people know and can reflect on their own lives, have questions and priorities of their own, have skills and sensitivities which can enhance any community-based projects.”<sup>24</sup> If you are working with an “Indigenous community, you are dependent on relationships.”<sup>25</sup> Using these research frameworks will allow us to innately ensure that relational accountability is imbedded in our work and research. Regardless if these methodologies do not follow Western positivist paradigms, they are methods that rely on subjectivity in order to fully understand the impacts of colonial influences through research and lived experience by Indigenous researchers. In later chapters, I establish a more reflexive autoethnographical voice to share my experiences in the hunt and engaging with land-based practices. For the purposes of the next chapter, we are getting ideas from other research projects, where later, I share our proposed community prevention plan.

A part of my research has been through interviews in a more informal setting, they are around a campfire, they are before, during, and after the hunts. In essence, they are storytelling of everyday lived experiences. Kovach adds “First Nations people need some space to talk so that we can share our stories in our own way and create discourses based on our Indigenous knowledge systems.”<sup>26</sup> According to Kovach, “some traditional story approaches to learning, such as contextual listening, purposeful repetition, presenting stories in segments, and allowing story meaning to arise from individual thinking and connection”<sup>27</sup> Thus, in later chapter, I share my own stories of hunting to talk about the differences in Indigenous approaches to hunting.

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<sup>24</sup> Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 130.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>26</sup> Kovach, *Indigenous Storywork*, 19.

<sup>27</sup> Kovach, *Indigenous Storywork*, 126.

## Chapter 1: Muscowpetung, Philosophy and Community health

This chapter focuses on what community health and wellness entail within my particular community, the Muscowpetung First Nation. I examine our community health, and our attempt to create a prevention strategy to mitigate diabetes in our community with foods provided by our hunters and land-based practitioners. In this chapter, I seek to demonstrate the linkages between land-based practices, such as hunting, and community health. In our Saulteaux community many strive for what is known as Mino-Biimadiziwin, which means ‘a good life.’ One where you are physically healthy and foster good relationships with family and community. Mino-Biimadiziwin is an Ojibwa concept that relates to living a good life, living healthy, and with *choice*. I start off by acknowledging the genealogy of Chiefs and headmen from Chief Cheekuk’s (the worthy one) tribe which later became known as the Muscowpetung Saulteaux Nation as you know it today. I acknowledge the lineage of my ancestors that created the space and reservation in which I come from and grew up on. Chief Cheekuk was the original chief on record from 1874 until his death in 1880. His headmen included Kayquasukkeemeeskunk, Keesick, Passang, Wakawesit, Wesackkeepiness, Pahsunk, and Mesakeepiness. We were originally known as *Chief Cheekuk’s tribe*, and he had a camp



of thousands of Plains Ojibwe that stemmed from the Great Lakes and abroad. He travelled from Minnesota and all the way to Montana for hunting while moving his camp and tribe. In 1874, Treaty 4 was signed on behalf of the Crown with the Saulteaux, Assiniboia, Cree, and other Indigenous nations inhabiting the south and central plains of the North-West Territories. On September 8, 1875, Chief Cheekuk, adhered to Treaty #4 on behalf of what later become known as the Muscowpetung Indian Band. According to historical records, Chief Cheekuk passed away in March of 1880, where Chief Muscowpetung took over along with his fellow headmen: Pasung, Keesik (John Moore), and Kaquatacommesung. Chief Muscowpetung lead along with Pasung and Kaquatacomemesung on August 8, 1881. Chief Muscowpetung led the tribe until his death in 1915. Chief Muscowpetung's headmen included Muscowcappo (Albert Cappo), Pasung, Keesick, Meshakeepnase (John Keepness), Apickinew, and Thunder Striking the Ground. With the introduction of the Indian Act, the Muscowpetung band had reverted to a colonial Indian Act government and left their traditional governance system. In 2022, Muscowpetung created their own laws that were accepted by Canada to create their own election system and be rid of the Indian Act, to which, I was happy to be a part of as a served as a headman during 2021-2022 along with Chief Melissa Tavita.

Muscowpetung Saulteaux Nation is a public body, which is an Indian Band (#381), as defined in the Indian Act with procedures to elect the Chief and Council in accordance with its new Election Act. Muscowpetung is in the process of drafting and implementing its own Kichi-Nakanakaywin (constitution or great law), to reflect our own laws instead of those set out through the Indian Act. We are actively looking at ways to reject the Indian Act, and create our own laws and be a self-determining government. A part of self-determination is

also taking indicators of your community's health and implement a prevention strategy as will be discussed.

### **Saulteaux/Ojibwa/Anishnaabe Philosophy**

In the Plains, we often call ourselves Saulteaux, but we know that this word is interchangeable with Ojibwa and Anishnaabe. The Saulteaux believe that one should strive for what is known as “mino bimidiziwin’ which translates to a good life. In my opinion, it also refers to having a life of choice. This could mean that we can have access to our sustainable livelihood through hunting, fishing, and trapping rights which is solidified through the numbered treaties. Leanne Simpson and Edna Manitowabi add “While I believe the ability to resonate with Indigenous peoples of all ages. It not only maps a way out of colonial thinking by confirming Indigenous life ways or alternative ways of being in the world. Ultimately, Indigenous theory seeks to dismantle colonialism while simultaneously building a renaissance of mino bimaadiziwin.”<sup>28</sup> How we learn about mino bimaadiziwin is through storytelling and spending time learning from our relatives. Simpson and Manitowabi state

“Storytelling is at its core decolonizing, because it is a process of remembering, visioning, and creating a just reality where Nishnaabeg live as both Nishnaabeg and peoples. Storytelling then becomes a sense through which we can envision our way out of cognitive imperialism, where we can create models and mirrors where none existed, and where we can experience the spaces of freedom and justice. Storytelling becomes a space where we can escape the gaze and the cage of the empire, even if it just a few minutes.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Simpson and Manitowabi, *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies*, 279-280

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 281

As previously stated, I call upon the methodology of storytelling as it serves as foundational pedagogy for Indigenous hunters. Jill Doerfler, Niigaanwewidam Sinclair, and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark add “storytelling is at its core decolonizing, because it is a process of remembering, visioning, and creating a just reality where Nishnaabeg live as both Nishnaabeg and peoples.”<sup>30</sup> Jo-Anne Archibald believes “The types of stories can vary from the sacred to the historical, from cultural traditions to personal life experiences and testimonials.”<sup>31</sup> We not only learn from storytelling, but also the physical praxis of engaging with our land-base as ultimately, the land serves as pedagogy as well, “this tells us that in order to access knowledge from a Nishnaabeg perspective, we have to engage our entire bodies: our physical beings, emotional self, our spiritual energy, and our intellect. Our methodologies, our life ways must reflect those components of our being and the integration of those four components into a whole. This gives rise to our ‘research methodologies,’ our ways of knowing, our processes for living the world.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, *this is why at the heart of this dissertation is the physical action of reconnecting with our land-base, hunting, and providing for my community*. Elizabeth Carlson-Manathara interviewed Ojibwa elder Kathi Kinew who states “my spiritual places are all with water. . .and trees, and rocks”<sup>33</sup> Anishnaabeg researcher Kathleen Absolon states, “Indigenous Peoples are often not preoccupied with re-searching colonial nations, we do however have a history of studying the earth, animals, plants and beings (human and others) that we interact with and relate to. We have a history of

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<sup>30</sup> Doerfler, Sinclair, and Stark, *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies*, 281

<sup>31</sup> Archibald, *Indigenous Storywork*, 83

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 288

<sup>33</sup> Carlson-Manathara, *Living In Indigenous Sovereignty*, 176

sharing knowledge across our Nations and seeking out knowledge from other Indigenous Nations.”<sup>34</sup>

The learnings and findings of how to navigate in modern society while being Saulteaux is called upon by *collective memory*, whereby our individual experiences in life contribute and add to it. Simpson and Manitowabi state “Our collective truths exist in a nest of individual diversity.”<sup>35</sup> The Saulteaux have been a people that have been extremely resilient. When the Crown had wanted Plains people (the Cree and Saulteaux) to stop following the buffalo, and settle down on Indian reservations and become farmers, we adapted to that change and thrived as farmers. In a later chapter, I go through the history of starvation that the Saulteaux people has had to face. Thus, we have always been a hunting people, and since our central dependency the buffalo has been decimated, we have also adapted to hunt elk, deer, and moose. I believe we are also a practical people, where our knowledge is just not gathered from storytelling, but also, our engagement with our land and our communities.

### **Food Sovereignty**

Food sovereignty is the ability for Indigenous nations to grow, harvest, and collect their food sources without interference from the state. Priscilla Settee and Shailesh Shukla state “Indigenous Peoples must be food sovereign in order to be sovereign as a Nation.”<sup>36</sup> Raj Patel and Sam Grey add “Food sovereignty is centrally, though not exclusively, about groups of people making their own decisions about the food system—it is a way of talking about a theoretically-informed food systems practice.”<sup>37</sup> Jeanette Armstrong notes a difference

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<sup>34</sup> Absolon, *Kaandossiwin*, 33

<sup>35</sup> Simpson and Manitowabi, *Centering Anishnaabeg Studies*, 289

<sup>36</sup> Settee and Shukla, *Indigenous Food Systems*, 1

<sup>37</sup> Patel, Raj., & Grey, Sam, *Food Sovereignty as Decolonization*, 431

between food security and food sovereignty: “food security’ is the right of all people to good, affordable food, and ‘food sovereignty’ is the right of all people to define their own, culturally appropriate food production systems”<sup>38</sup> Charlotte Cote believes that “enacting food sovereignty is positioned within our struggles for decolonization and self-determination and is central to restoring health and wellness in our Indigenous communities.”<sup>39</sup>

Thus, we also have to understand that in the Plains, food has been used to try and control and manipulate Indigenous peoples and separate us from our land-based relationships. Sarah Carter states, “the virtual extermination of the buffalo in Canada proceeded the final slaughter in the northwestern United States by a few years, as they were finally extinct there in 1883.”<sup>40</sup> Buffalo has always been the Plains central dependency, but in an orchestrated effort by Canada and the United States the bison population has been decimated. In the US, “recent studies have focused on the role of the U.S. Army, suggesting that the extermination of the buffalo was the result of a well-calculated policy to subdue Native Americans and drive them unto reserves.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, it is important that we grow, and hunt our own foods because historically, food us been used against us. Food was politicized and controlled by Indian Agents who would withhold Government rations so that the Indigenous leaders would stay on their reservations. Keeping in mind of this period of starvation, we must use food to free ourselves from chronic ailments and be able to sustain our nations for the future. Michael Robidoux and Courtney Mason state "Indigenous peoples face, in particular around food access and the subsequent health problems related to insufficient and low quality food

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<sup>38</sup> Armstrong, Jeannette, *Living From the Land*, 37.

<sup>39</sup> Cote, Charlotte, *A Drum in One Hand, A Sockeye in the Other*, 24.

<sup>40</sup> Carter, Sarah, *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada to 1900*, 95-96.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 96.

sources."<sup>42</sup> Priscilla Settee and Shaeilesh Shakla add “traditional economies that once provided healthy diets and nutrition are under extreme threat because of western models of development that have left many Indigenous communities in desperate living conditions.”<sup>43</sup> As Indigenous people, we have always adapted to the impacts of our food systems. Robidoux and Mason add “Indigenous communities have an extended history of survival on the land, which included developed food system and networks.”<sup>44</sup> Secwepemc scholar Dawn Morrison notes: “For thousands of years, Indigenous people have developed a wide range of traditional harvesting strategies and practices, including, hunting, fishing, gathering, and cultivating a vast number of plants and animals in the fields, forests, and waterways.”<sup>45</sup> Robidoux and Mason believe “Food sovereignty is not just about nutrition and affordability, but also about a connection to history, land/place, culture, and tradition”<sup>46</sup> By extension, Morrison adds “Indigenous cultures are shaped by our unique relationship to the land and food systems within our respective traditional territories”<sup>47</sup> Thus, Indigenous food systems are very diverse under the umbrella of Indigenous food sovereignty. Gardening is more difficult in Canada than it is in South America, where they can grow their seeds all year round. For us in the Plains, it is easier to hunt, fish, and trap. This complexity with Indigenous food systems shows the ability for Indigenous people to adapt. Morrison states “while there is no universal definition of food sovereignty that reflects all of the realities of the myriad of Indigenous communities around the world, the underlying principle of Indigenous food sovereignty are

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<sup>42</sup> Robidoux and Mason, *A Land Not Forgotten*, 5

<sup>43</sup> Settee and Shakla, *Indigenous Food Systems*, 2

<sup>44</sup> Robidoux and Mason, *A Land Not Forgotten* 3

<sup>45</sup> Morrison, *Food Sovereignty in Canada*, 97

<sup>46</sup> Robidoux and Mason, *A Land Not Forgotten*, 20

<sup>47</sup> Morrison, *Food Sovereignty in Canada*, 97

based on our responsibilities to uphold our distinct cultures and relationships to the land and food systems.”<sup>48</sup> Morrison also adds, “although Indigenous peoples did not originally use the language of food sovereignty, this concept was a 'living reality.’”<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, whether we are gardening, hunting, or fishing, when Indigenous peoples harvest and collect their own food, they are taking back their power, while being self-determining in their community health. For the Plains, hunting has been our main method for collecting our food. Thus, hunting in modern times, is exercising our sovereignty because hunting, fishing, and trapping is also a treaty right.

### **Case Study of Muscowpetung First Nation**

Muscowpetung First Nation is located in the beautiful Qu’Appelle Valley, in southeastern Saskatchewan, Canada—which is in the homelands of the Treaty 4 territory. The landscape is situated in the Qu’Appelle Valley, where a nearby marsh is located which divides rolling hills. We are a Saulteaux (Plains Ojibwe) community that utilizes a *mixed economy* to sustain our livelihood. A mixed economy includes utilizing land-based practices while working a full-time job to purchase other food products that are desired. This is similar to what Dara Kelly means when she connects food to community in that “in terms of Coast Salish Riverworldview wherein the relationship between humans and fish includes the idea that it is a means for people to connect and build relationships to nurture Coast Salish socio-cultural, spiritual and environmental interconnectedness. Fish enables many levels of exchange that allow people to literally and spiritually ‘feed’ one another”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 97

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 97

<sup>50</sup> Kelly, “Feed the People and You Will Never Go Hungry,” 86

Like most Indigenous communities, we suffer from the ailments of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular issues, obesity, and type II diabetes – the diseases of colonization, or as Kanaka Maoli scholar Ty Tengan states “colonization of the body manifests itself not only in culturally defined regimes of sexuality and propriety, but also in more viscerally distressing ways through obesity, diabetes, cancer and other health-related problems.”<sup>51</sup> We would like to focus on type II diabetes in our community because it is a disease that can be prevented by education and action - which includes diet, physical activity, and community planning. Although, we do not know the rates of type I diabetes which is due to genetic factors; we can at least control type II diabetes which is related to diet and lifestyle.

The Muscowpetung First Nation’s leadership, seeks to have a community-action plan in regard to health and wellness—this is more so a grassroots movement and community initiative, however, does have support from Muscowpetungs leadership. Muscowpetung wants to be a community of *choice*, where children and young adults will have access to healthy foods to foster healthy growth and development.

As shall be discussed later, we will be providing our community members with a variety of healthy options in the areas of physical fitness, cooking classes, diet, nutrition workshops, and organizing hunting and gardening groups to encourage the harvesting of our own foods. Although I will be focusing more so on the hunting group, these other activities will be ongoing as well.

We believe that type II diabetes can be prevented with the help of related programming being available to our members. We want to encourage and provide access to healthy choices as a means of addressing sedentary behavior in the community. According to Anishinaabe

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<sup>51</sup> Tengan, *Native Men Remade*, 146

scholar Winona LaDuke, “Prior to the 1940s, there is little record of diabetes in most Native communities.”<sup>52</sup> In modern times, this is not the case. We estimate that our community has a type II diabetes rate of 12% based on information that was gathered in 2012. According to Statistics Canada, in 2016, “7.0% of Canadians aged 12 and older reported being diagnosed with diabetes.”<sup>53</sup> The Public Health Agency of Canada has reported a diabetes rate of 17.2% among First Nations people living on reserve in comparison to the 5% prevalence rate of diabetes among non-Indigenous Canadians.<sup>54</sup> The reported rate of type II diabetes in our community is significantly higher than that of mainstream Canadians. While genetic vulnerability plays a role in the development of diabetes, its prevalence is primarily contributed to nonmedical factors such as sedentization and dietary change, high cost, and limited availability of healthy foods and sociostructural barriers such as poverty and poor infrastructure.<sup>55</sup> Taking this into consideration, Muscowpetung would like to reduce the rate of type II diabetes through the utilization of a community-action plan around youth prevention.

According to ISC data records reported by the community in 2018, Muscowpetung had a total registered population of 1443 members, of which 27% lived on-reserve and 73% off-reserve. Of that population, 21% were under the age of 15 and only 7.8% were over the age of 65, indicating a young member population. The average age on Muscowpetung is 33 years.

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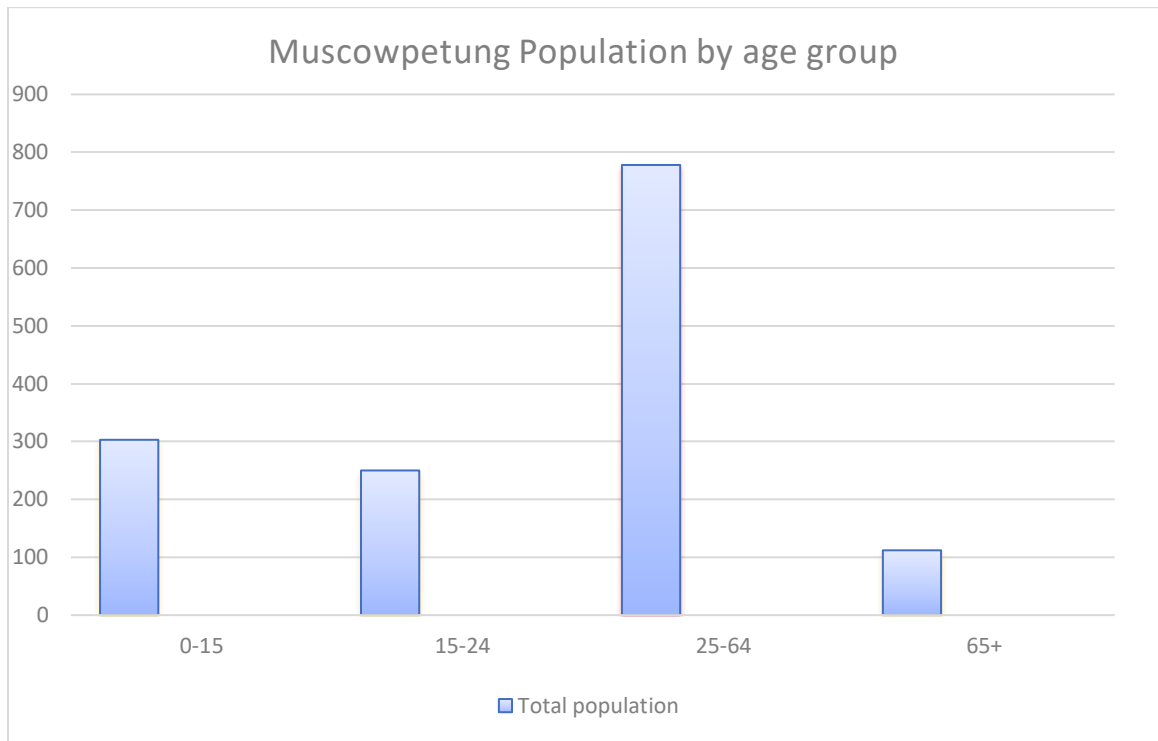
<sup>52</sup> LaDuke, *Defending the Sacred*, 195.

<sup>53</sup> Statistics Canada, “Diabetes,”

<sup>54</sup> Wilson, “Therapeutic Landscapes,” 88.

<sup>55</sup> Rice, “Best Practices,” 2016.

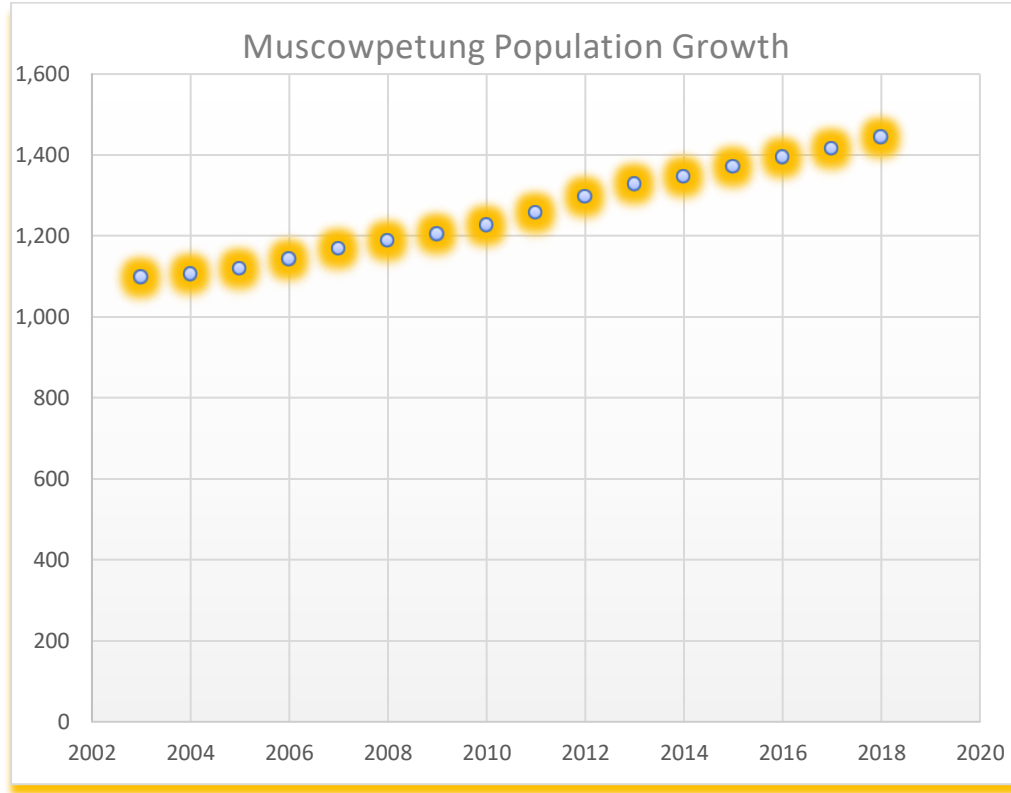
### 1443 Total Population by Age and Gender - 2018



Since 2000, the total population of 1098 experienced an average annual growth rate (AAGR) of 3.47%. As of 2020, the population is at 1443 band members, and grew 24% since 2000.

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## Historic Population Growth (2000-2020)



According to this graph, you can see that our population for our nation has increased by 24% since 2000. The median age on Muscowpetung is 33 years of age. By focusing primarily on the demographic of youth and younger people, the Muscowpetung leadership believes that the knowledge acquired surrounding healthy eating and physical activity through traditional food education, workshops, and activities taught by local Elders will contribute to the overall health and wellbeing of our nation for generations to come, all while supporting the development of our youth in a culturally appropriate way. While our community action plan is primarily youth focused, community members of all ages will be encouraged to support and participate in programming and community events.

Muscowpetung believes that youth are at an age where we can contribute to support them with healthy behaviors and lifestyle. We are trying to address the risk factors that contribute to type II diabetes on the Muscowpetung First Nation. These noted risk factors include sedentary lifestyles and physical inactivity, tobacco abuse, and poor diet. We believe that the adoption of healthier lifestyles can be encouraged through the development of programming, educational workshops, and physical activities for youth with support from community members of all ages.

An important part of our project is to have an emphasis of growing and harvesting our own foods to support our diets in the community. This will include fresh garden vegetables such as carrots, potatoes, onions, beets, turnips. I was fortunate that my father was a hunter and venison, and moose meat were readily available throughout my childhood.

This project will involve the mobilization of community from youth to Elders and will involve mentorship for newer land-based practitioners which will be discussed more in-depth in a later chapter. Thus far, we have put on several hunting camps and will continue to do so as we are preparing for any potential COVID-19 lockdowns. We have a hunting group on our reserve that we call ‘the rez hunters,’ who often spend 3-7 days in the bush ensuring that our community freezer is filled with elk, moose, deer, and bison. Enabling land-based practitioners to harvest and deliver foods to community members will reduce the risk factor of having access to healthy foods. We will outline our community plan on how we are going to implement an intervention strategy with the many activities and programming we are going to offer throughout the years. We are currently in the initial stages of development for our intervention strategy. We have been giving out food to our community members for about

three years now and community members, especially our Elders, are enjoying the harvested meats.

Most recently, we have purchased 15 Plains bison for our Muscowpetung Community Pasture. We have decided to do this as a nation because we might have to lock down our community in the fall or wintertime because of COVID-19 risks and concerns. There was a lot of fear and panic that if we were to go into a lockdown that we would have to close our borders and ensure that we had enough food in our community for the winter months. I will discuss the other implications of the returning of the bison in a later chapter. Thereafter, in the fall, we will harvest our garden vegetables and do a food-drive at our local Health Centre to give away the harvest of our community gardens for the winter months. For our fall hunts, we will be training our community members with hunting safety and learning the essential skills to harvest and butcher wild meats while also preparing them for distribution. We plan as an Indigenous community to become a model for other Indigenous communities in that we can reduce the risks of diabetes and diet-related diseases by a community action approach while using the resources already within the community. To my knowledge, other First Nations in our area that do this are Standing Buffalo Dakota Nation, and the Whitebear First Nation. In the first couple of years, I have had inquiries for neighboring communities to send their youth to the hunting camp so that they too could learn. We believe that, in partnership with our youth, Elders, and the Muscowpetung leadership, we can work together as a community to ensure a good quality of life for our youth for generations to come. I touch more on the mentorship and community impacts of *togetherness* in a later chapter. By bonding, learning, sharing, struggling, we become a stronger community that can deliver practical solutions.

We first organized a winter hunting and survival skills camp in November 2018

and have since continued organizing camps to train our young hunters with firearms safety, hunting, survival skills and harvesting skills. During our time in 2018, we invited Warrant Officer Ahenakew of the Canadian Forces (who is also from the Ahtahkakoop First Nation) to teach the youth survival skills which included building shelters in -40c weather, creating SOS fires, search and rescue, and harvesting and preparing wild meats. We plan to continue organizing similar camps in locations all throughout Saskatchewan, where youth will learn to harvest wild meat to distribute to Elders and families on-reserve. The youth will also learn ceremonial protocols around hunting, respect, and the importance of this cultural performance, that has been done by Indigenous people since time immemorial. This will innately strengthen and nurture the relationships between youth and Elders, as well as ensure cultural continuity and maintenance.

Another initiative that we would like to pursue eventually is mentorship between Muscowpetung Elders and youth in the areas of *medicine picking*, which will involve hiking and walking into rural areas to pick medicines and herbs. We believe that this will allow for knowledge translation between Elders and youth, so that youth can learn about herbs, how to pick and prepare medicines. This will also allow the youth to learn about the importance of different plants in promoting their health.

We plan to achieve a community-based strategy to encourage education on diet and practical skills such as harvesting local meats through hunting and vegetables through community gardens. We seek to provide opportunities for our youth and community members so that they have multiple opportunities to be engaged in physical activity. Indigenous people see health as holistic or complete in respect to an individual's mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual balance. In essence, Indigenous health is community in action. Muscowpetung

seeks to give our youth and community members an opportunity to be balanced in all aspects of their lives.

It is important that Indigenous peoples reconnect with their land-base to improve community health. Anishinaabe Winona LaDuke believes “the traditional practices of gardening, harvesting, fishing, and hunting provided for most Native American communities not only [provided] essential nutrition but also the essential physical activities required for good health.”<sup>56</sup> The goal of this chapter is to get a better insight into how other land-based projects have contributed to the improvement of health, so we can learn and apply this to Muscowpetung. In this chapter, I will explore Indigenous health research and review other land-based projects that have been undertaken, so that we ensure that Muscowpetung’s diabetes prevention and land-based efforts learns from the successes and challenges of other similar projects. This prevention plan is directly linked to the harvesting of our foods from our hunting, and gardening groups. It is the communities yearly harvest that will serve as the foundation for our community health.

Later in the chapter, I explain our community’s practical efforts with workshops, cooking classes, and our community hunting project with our ‘rez hunters’ hunting group. I then take a statistical snapshot of my community, Muscowpetung First Nation, to get a sense of the statistics and health indicators at the community level. I aim to get a better understanding of diabetes and give an update on how the community receives harvested local foods and how it is affecting them.

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<sup>56</sup> La Duke, *Recovering the Sacred*, 191.

## Indigenous Health

We have to get a better understanding of health in the Indigenous sense. According to Mi'kmaq scholar Charlotte Loppie and Fred Wien, "Indigenous ideologies embrace a holistic concept of health that reflects physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental dimensions. However, it is the interrelatedness of these dimensions that is perhaps the most noteworthy."<sup>57</sup> Thus, there are a variety of ways that these dimensions of Indigenous health can be affected. Cherokee scholar Jeff Corntassel adds that "being Indigenous today means struggling to reclaim and regenerate one's relational, place-based existence by challenging the ongoing, destructive forces of colonization."<sup>58</sup> This place-based existence in the Canadian context for some Indigenous people today is seen on-reserve and/or in urban locations. Some Indigenous people are still utilizing a land-based pedagogy to teach the younger generations the cultural performances of hunting and gardening. Ultimately, utilizing a land-based pedagogy (a future chapter) will thereby improve *community health and cultural continuity* in theoretical and practical ways. Pueblo scholar Harold Herrod believes, "The circulation of food to the families and the entire encampment assured that the old, the infirm, and the less fortunate would have adequate nutrition and that hunters could demonstrate their generosity, which provided them with status in the group."<sup>59</sup> As Secwepemc scholar Dawn Morrison notes: "For thousands of years, Indigenous people have developed a wide range of traditional harvesting strategies and practices, including, hunting, fishing, gathering, and cultivating a vast number of plants and animals in the fields, forests, and waterways."<sup>60</sup> (2011. 97).

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<sup>57</sup> Loppie and Wien, "Health Inequalities," 8.

<sup>58</sup> Corntassel and Bryce, "Practicing Sustainable Self-Determination," 152.

<sup>59</sup> Herrod, *The Animals Came Dancing*, 13.

<sup>60</sup> Morrison, Dawn, *Food Sovereignty in Canada*, 97

Another narrative that is important to explore is Indigenous woman's involvement with land-based practices. Zapotec scholar Isabel Altamarino-Jiménez states, "Not only do women contribute to their communities' economies and social organizations, but their practices and livelihood also require an elaborate knowledge of their communities' environments. Women were, and many continue to be, skillful hunters,"<sup>61</sup> I believe there are many important narratives and findings that can be furtherly explored when men and women re-connect to their land base to improve their community health. We look at roles and responsibility with Indigenous women and queer-gendered people in later chapters. The youth involved in this project will also be mentored so that we encourage women who hunt and engage in land-based practices to destabilize hegemonic masculinities around hunting and *'roles,' to encourage fluidity around our cultural performances and responsibilities.* This project seeks to create a space so that men, women, and queer-gendered individuals feel welcomed to partake in their cultural performances while also highlighting their struggles from an intersectional point of view.

We will now explore some of the research projects that highlight the importance of relational accountability and that also promote Indigenous nationhood. Jana-Rae Yerxa, an Anishnaabe scholar from the Couchiching First Nation conducted a Community Governance Project (CGP) that focused on harvesting *manoomin* (wild rice) in her community. Yerxa explains the profound impact the act of harvesting wild rice has had on her community. Yerxa states, "The more I thought about us gathering at Neyaashing to roast manoomin it became clear that this would be a meaningful act of resurgence for Anishinaabeg. We would assert Anishinaabeg nationhood by re-presencing ourselves on our traditional lands, lands that we

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<sup>61</sup> Altamarino-Jiménez, *Indigenous Encounters with Neoliberalism*, 81

have been displaced from; we would engage in land-based practices that have always sustained our people.”<sup>62</sup> Yerxa continues, “[a]s active agents of liberation, our imaginations and visions shattered colonial confinements; the past, present and future came alive at the same time.”<sup>63</sup> In regard to relational accountability, she writes, “We are our relationships. To understand your connection to all of creation is to better understand who you are as an Anishinaabe person. Anishinaabeg resurgence cannot happen in isolation and without love”<sup>64</sup> Lastly, she states, “Within Anishinaabeg pedagogy, land is a source of knowledge about how to conduct good relationships that transcend Western notions of time, law, and boundaries.”<sup>65</sup> With the above aforementioned, we can see how mobilizing a community to participate in activities, such as harvesting *manoomin*, can bring together community. It can also create opportunity for knowledge translation between elders and youth, and ultimately, be a source of resurgence that transcends colonialism and the situations it has put us in.

The White Earth reservation in Minnesota is another community harvesting wild rice. Anishinaabe scholar Winona LaDuke states, “Each fall, the families would move toward their rice camps on the lakes, beginning in the Crow Wing Lakes to the south and east of the reservation, then moving with the ripening of rice to the northern lakes.”<sup>66</sup> She adds, “The annual finale is at Big Rice Lake, where rice landings still retain names of families and villages—like Big Bear, Bonga, and Ponsford—reminiscent of the long tradition of gathering at lakeside for the annual harvest [...] Today, there are fewer ricers.”<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, LaDuke

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<sup>62</sup> Yerxa, “Gii-kaapizigemin manoomin,” 160.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 160.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 162.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 160.

<sup>66</sup> LaDuke, *Recovering the Sacred*, 167.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 167.

states, “Ricers are also challenged by the economics of wild rice in the age of globalization, mechanization, and misrepresentative advertising.”<sup>68</sup> According to LaDuke, “For the past five years, the Anishinaabeg community has requested that the University of Minnesota stop its genetic work on wild rice.”<sup>69</sup> As a result, “In early 2005, the White Earth and Fond du Lac bands of Ojibwe in Minnesota both adopted ordinances banning the use of their wild rice for the purpose of genetic modification or the importation onto the reservation of any genetically modified wild rice seed.”<sup>70</sup> As you can see, the conducting of research projects in Indigenous communities have potential to help in advocating against neoliberalism and globalization. Indigenous research can also be seen as a form of resistance to external companies, such as what I have observed in this project and in the next project.

We have to get a better understanding of decolonization as praxis through grounded normativity where Dene scholar Glen Coulthard states “I call this place-based foundation of Indigenous decolonized thought and practice grounded normativity, by which I mean the modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman others over time.”<sup>71</sup> How can we take elements of these research projects that invoke grounded normativity and enact them in the everyday? Corntassel states, “By focusing on ‘everyday’ acts of resurgence, one disrupts the colonial physical, social and political boundaries designed to impede our actions to restore our nationhood.”<sup>72</sup> As

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 167-168.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 179.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 183.

<sup>71</sup> Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 13

<sup>72</sup> Corntassel and Bryce, “Practicing Sustainable Self-Determination,” 88.

Indigenous researchers, it is not just about conducting research for the purposes of the academy – it is about ensuring that relationships with Indigenous communities are still nurtured and perhaps research can highlight this. Everyday acts of resurgence can be utilized as a way to move from being solely within the academy and into the community, on the daily. This daily activity for Indigenous people is usually associated with good health, as Winona LaDuke states “the traditional practices of gardening, harvesting, fishing, and hunting provided for most Native American communities not only essential nutrition but also the essential physical activities required for good health.”<sup>73</sup> LaDuke also adds “the recovery of the people is tied to the recovery of food, since food itself is medicine: not only for the body, but for the soul, for the spiritual connection to history, ancestors, and the land.”<sup>74</sup>

The *body* is essential in any land-based research project and in everyday acts of resurgence. Anishinaabe scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson states, “My nationhood doesn’t just radiate outwards, it also radiates inwards. It is my physical body, my mind, and my spirit.”<sup>75</sup> Simpson, on the body, states, “Indigenous bodies don’t relate to the land by possessing or owning it or having control over it. We relate to land through connection—generative, affirmative, complex, overlapping, and nonlinear relationship.”<sup>76</sup> She also adds, “Kinetics, the act of doing, isn’t just praxis; it also generates and animates theory within Indigenous knowledge. Theory and praxis, story and practice are interdependent, co-creators of knowledge. Practices are politics. Processes are governance.”<sup>77</sup> Lastly, Simpson states, “The processes within nation-based grounded normativities destroy the structures of

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<sup>73</sup> LaDuke, *Recovering the Sacred*, 191.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 210

<sup>75</sup> Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 9.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 43.

<sup>77</sup> Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 20.

colonialism because they perpetually shift power back.”<sup>78</sup> Grounded normativities meaning everyday acts of resurgence in the Indigenous community. It is one of the few spaces where we can operate within our nationhood/peoplehood without state interference (unless it is action directed at the state) and mobilize community regardless of age or gender.

Now that we have understood the importance of reconnecting to land, let us have insight into *responsibilities* as Indigenous people. From the Hawaiian context, Kānaka Maoli scholar Noelani Goodyear-Ka’opua states that, “Liberatory praxis based on kuleana and lāhui offers forms of belonging, collective authority and social organization that stem from Indigenous cultural practice rather than a state-centric paradigm.”<sup>79</sup> She adds, “Kuleana should be more fully explored as a principle for building post-imperial futures that carve autonomous spaces outside of the capitalist, private property system by looking at traditional practices of providing food for the people.”<sup>80</sup> Ultimately, “The land is a chief, and the people are her servants. This kuleana is upon all people, whether we recognize it or not. If we fail to respect this authority, we will not survive as a lāhui Kānaka.”<sup>81</sup> It is everyone’s kuleana to reconnect to the land, as it serves as a pedagogy for learning and restoring balance. Goodyear-Ka’opua states, “Hawaiian or Indigenous learning was simplified as cultural practice that was practical, as opposed to intellectual, and took place outdoors through hands-on work.”<sup>82</sup> Lastly, “Such land-based practices can also be sources of metaphor and theory—tools to help clear and reclaim the epistemological space that allows Indigenous knowledge to flow and

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>79</sup> Goodyear-Ka’opua, “Kuleana Lahui,” 131-132.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 111.

grow.”<sup>83</sup> In regards to resurgence movements, Nehiyaw scholar Gina Starblanket states “A relational approach has the potential to mitigate these risks by demonstrating that there is no fixed structure or formula defining resurgence movements, but that they are constantly changing, contingent and culturally produced.”<sup>84</sup> We are at a point where we can be creative with our land-based efforts in using today’s technologies to mobilize, while still being true to our traditions and ways of life, while also learning from land-based pedagogy.

In a conversation with Isleta Pueblo artist and land-based practitioner, Daryl Lucero, he reflects on how land-based practices can influence health:

**Shane:** *How do you see land-based projects improving community health?*

**Daryl:** “I think that ... the big thing I see is the big stress in a land-based system is navigating healthy relations. None of it happens without the people or knowledge you can’t do it on your own. A major component into conscious land-based practices is creating the safe space for people to engage in one another. And facilitate and foster any kind of and limiting beliefs and toxic relationships and violence. In these spaces we can’t cater to that. We got take the defensive side of things. If we can work through that as communities and families, I could only imagine the benefits would come from that.”

**Shane:** *why is it important to cultivate and harvest your own foods?*

**Daryl:** “approach food from an Indigenous land-based practice, there’s specifically benefits from having and eating food that our bodies are capable of processing. The health benefits that are associated with that. Having an

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 141.

<sup>84</sup> Starblanket, *Resurgence as Relationality*, 32.

Indigenous diet can address health ailments like diabetes and heart issues. Even like at-risk populations who experience strokes and blood circulation. There's that perspective from it. Also, mental health, people growing their own food establishing more intimate relationship with their food and relationships with cultivating. Thinking about their own emotional processes that are taking place out there. When you combine Indigenous diet with land-based practices while being physical, there's a lot of processes that supports mental health and awareness. . . . When you think about capitalist systems of food it forces us to be dependent on their systems. That puts families at high risk because they are dependent on it. If we practice food sovereignty, to provide food for our people that's our own food systems. And with this pandemic, its essential. Gardening there's a lot of potential there for people to make it primary source of their diet to supplement nutrition. Your body and digestion system. There's so much benefits to having an Indigenous land-based diet.”

In Daryl and I's conversation, you can see that growing your own foods is taking responsibility of your own health. It also reiterated the importance of *food sovereignty*, and that we should not give the responsibility growing and harvesting foods up to a massive food industry to be prepared for us. Not only is a lot of the food that is prepared for us done unethically, (slaughterhouses) but there is an Indigenous way of taking an animal's life and showing respect for their life in the harvesting process. (tobacco, and this will also be further touched on in a later chapter). Many Indigenous communities face chronic health conditions because of unhealthy diets that lead to type II diabetes, hypertension, and obesity. Most of the land-based practitioners that are constantly involved with their cultural practice are not only

harvesting their own foods, but they also utilizing the physical exercise. We become self-determining in our community health when we choose to grow our own foods.

As previously stated, we will be utilizing Cornstassel's *everyday acts of resurgence* throughout our community project, hunting groups, and gardening groups. With this mind, I write from a reflexive autoethnographical experience that views the land-based processes from years of engagement and mentorship. The majority of the research is done by in-person interviews through storytelling, usually around a campfire, and other informal circumstances. I believe that these interviews are done during our community hunts where storytelling is the main *methodology* that is passed down from one generation to another. I am writing my own stories as well as the stories of other Indigenous hunters that came before me. In essence, our Indigenous ways of knowing and gaining knowledge have always been through *storytelling*; it has always been our methodology and access to knowledge for our nations. I seek to write these stories and hold these on a paper that hopefully allows the reader to understand the significance of land-based praxis, and community engagement. I am fortunate that I was able to interview Indigenous hunters from the Yukon all the way to Isleta, New Mexico, and everything in between. I was also able to interview women, and two-spirited hunters who gave their insight into Indigenous hunting and labour in the community. I will be telling their stories and highlight their experience in hunting and other land-based practices.

### **Diabetes and First Nations**

The File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council (FHQTC), along with our health nurse in Muscowpetung, have gathered data surrounding the on-reserve rate of type II diabetes and estimate it to be at 12% on-reserve. There is a normalized epidemic of type II diabetes in First Nations communities, and Muscowpetung is no exception. Type II diabetes can contribute to

a series of additional health conditions including restricted blood flow, low insulin, and high blood sugar which can lead to fatigue and dizziness. Type II diabetes is another major cause to other adverse health effects. According to Harris, et. al., the “National survey data [has] consistently shown that the national age-adjusted prevalence of diabetes is 3 to 5 times higher in First Nations than in the general population (2-5) screening has shown rates as high as 26% in individual communities.”<sup>85</sup> Diabetes is also disproportionately seen in the younger Indigenous demographic, where “Incidence and prevalence rates are higher, age of diagnosis is younger in First Nations. These rates are similar in other countries where Indigenous populations have been subject to colonization.”<sup>86</sup> In addition, “The higher rate of adverse health outcomes in Aboriginal peoples is associated with a number of factors, including lifestyle (diet and physical activity), genetic susceptibility, and historical-political and psychosocial factors, stemming from a history of colonization that severely undermined Aboriginal values, culture, and spiritual practices.”<sup>87</sup> According to Young, Reading, Elias, and O’Neil, “Diabetes can be considered to be indicative of the rapid sociocultural changes experienced by Aboriginal people in the past several decades.”<sup>88</sup> Other factors contributing to adverse health are the socioeconomic situations on-reserve where “Barriers to care that are unique to Aboriginal settings also exacerbate the problem with fragmented healthcare, poor chronic disease management, high healthcare staff turnover, and limited or non-existent surveillance.”<sup>89</sup> By extension, social determinants of health for Indigenous people include: “Low income, lack of education, high unemployment, poor living conditions, lack of social

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<sup>85</sup> Harris et. al, *Type 2 Diabetes in Aboriginal People*, 191.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 191.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 191.

<sup>88</sup> Young et. al, “Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus,” 561.

<sup>89</sup> Harris et. al, “Type 2 Diabetes,” 191.

support, negative stereotyping and stigmatization, and poor access to health services compound the problem”<sup>90</sup> According to Young et al, in Indigenous communities, the “adoption of modern foods and the decline of hunting and fishing are widely believed to be the underlying causes of the epidemic.”<sup>91</sup> Muscowpetung wants to ensure that our community members have supports in place so that social determinants of health are not a barrier for them and that access to foods is much easier. According to Earle, “traditionally, Indigenous diets and consumption patterns arose from complex and holistic food systems that provided health benefits beyond nutrition. Culture - a determinant of health, is intricately tied to traditional Aboriginal foods. Not only are traditional foods valued from cultural, spiritual and health perspectives, but the activities involved in their acquisition and distribution allow for the practice of cultural values such as sharing and cooperation.”<sup>92</sup>

Implementing traditional land-based practices such as hunting, and other food harvesting provide opportunity to treat not only the physical health of our community members but also the mental and spiritual wellbeing which will be furtherly explored in future chapters. It is also interesting to note that “while genetic factors are important in the epidemic of type 2 diabetes among Indigenous peoples, its rapid appearance over a few decades in genetically diverse populations is likely the result of an interaction of local genetic mutations with numerous social stressors and lifestyle factors”<sup>93</sup> Diabetes amongst Indigenous people has long-lasting ill effects, where “Indigenous people with diabetes also experience disparities in diabetes-related complications and mortality. Higher prevalence rates of microvascular

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 191.

<sup>91</sup> Young et. al, “Type 2 Diabetes in Mellitus,” 565.

<sup>92</sup> Earle, “Traditional Aboriginal Diets and Health,” 3.

<sup>93</sup> Harris et. al, “Type 2 Diabetes,” 192.

disease, including chronic kidney disease, lower limb amputation, foot abnormalities, and more severe retinopathy, are found in Aboriginal peoples with diabetes than in the general population with diabetes.”<sup>94</sup> Other risk factors include: “higher rates of macrovascular disease and exhibit higher rates of cardiometabolic risk factors, including smoking, obesity, and hypertension, that may indicate a future increase in cardiovascular morbidity and mortality.”<sup>95</sup> In addition to this, “First Nations people with diabetes have a high rates of albuminuria and are more likely than others to progress to end-stage renal disease (ESRD).”<sup>96</sup> As aforementioned, there is an epidemic of diabetes in Indigenous communities and we want to be a model for other Indigenous communities that with correct planning, organizing, and leadership, to prove that Indigenous communities can prevent diabetes in practical ways. In Indigenous communities, the “Adoption of modern foods and the decline of hunting and fishing are widely believed to be the underlying causes of the epidemic.”<sup>97</sup> Increased dependence on market foods in our community has contributed to the adoption of a diet high in refined sugars, carbohydrates and processed ingredients. Foods that are processed and high in refined sugars and carbohydrates are often consumed due to their availability and low price. Through our community action plan, we want to encourage our members to live healthier lifestyles through participation in physical activity and the growing and harvesting of vegetables and meats as an alternative and as a solution to decreasing dependence on market processed foods.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>97</sup> Young et. al, “Type 2 Diabetes in Mellitus,” 565.

Muscowpetung's proposed programming, workshops and activities utilize both traditional and contemporary methods of encouraging healthy eating and physical activity. As stated earlier, participation in land-based practices for sustenance has dramatically decreased among First Nations due to a variety of reasons including the "decreased transfer of cultural knowledge from elders to young people; a decrease in time and energy available for harvesting due to paid employment; loss of taste for traditional foods due to the uptake of market foods."<sup>98</sup> Young, et. al, have determined that "Diabetes is not simply a metabolic disorder that can be adequately dealt with on an individual basis in a clinical or hospital ward. Its prevention and control require community action and collaboration among Aboriginal organizations, governments, voluntary agencies and health care professionals."<sup>99</sup> We want a strong evaluation process throughout the prevention initiatives. This will include yearly surveys and monitoring with our community health nurse to ensure that we have less rates of type II diabetes in our community, and to determine any risk factors in community individuals. In the long term, we hope to reduce our rate below the national average of Canadians, and especially in the literature for Indigenous communities, where ours is at 12%. Efforts in primary prevention can reduce the rate of type II diabetes in Indigenous communities. It is believed by Harris et. al that, "Efforts to prevent diabetes should focus on all diabetes risk factors, including prevention of childhood, adolescent, adult, and pregravid obesity; and prevention and optimal management of diabetes in pregnancies to reduce macrosomia and diabetes risk in offspring."<sup>100</sup> They also add "prevention strategies in communities should be implemented in collaboration with community leaders, healthcare

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<sup>98</sup> Power, "Conceptualizing Food Security," 96.

<sup>99</sup> Young et. al, "Type 2 Diabetes in Mellitus," 565.

<sup>100</sup> Harris et. al, "Type 2 Diabetes," 192.

professionals, and funding agencies to engage entire communities, promote environmental changes, and prevent increased risk of diabetes.”<sup>101</sup> They also mention that it is important that “Programs should be developed in collaboration with communities and implemented within the framework of available health resources and infrastructure of each community and promote traditional activities and foods (provided they are safe, acceptable, and accessible).”<sup>102</sup> Other examples have shown that prevention can be achieved in terms of knowledge of diet and youth fitness, such as with the Zuni peoples: “In Zuni First Nations children in the United States, an educational component targeting decreased consumption of sugared beverages, knowledge of diabetes risk factors, and a youth-oriented fitness center significantly decreased insulin resistance,” by extension, “these types of intervention[s] aimed at decreasing childhood obesity, as well as efforts to promote breast-feeding in the first year of life, [which] may help to reduce the risk of diabetes.”<sup>103</sup> It is important to note that, “Lifestyle intervention programs targeted towards Aboriginal people with diabetes show modest results. Targeted programs to improve diet and increase exercise have been effective in improving glycemic control, reducing caloric intake, reducing weight, reducing WC and diastolic blood pressure, and increasing folate intake. A key component to all successful programs is cultural appropriateness.”<sup>104</sup> In regards to diabetes and cultural competence, “Treatment of diabetes in Aboriginal peoples should be in the context of local traditions, language, and culture, while also adhering to current clinical practice guidelines,” they also add “working with community healthcare providers and community leaders assures that local

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 192.

resources and challenges, such as access to healthy foods, geographic location, and isolation level, are acknowledged and considered that programs developed are community-directed.”<sup>105</sup>

To conclude this chapter, as Muscowpetung community members, we are fortunate that we are located near Fort Qu’Appelle, where we can access the resources of the File Hills Qu’Appelle Tribal Council (FHQTC) such as the All Nations Healing Hospital (ANHH). With access to health resources, we can develop a better monitoring process for type II diabetes and pre-diabetes risk factors. It is believed that, “There is an urgent need for systematic and validated surveillance and prevalence, incidence, and morbidity and mortality rates due to type 2 diabetes in First Nations communities.”<sup>106</sup> According to Young, et. al “the primary prevention of diabetes involves the promotion of healthy behaviours, especially achieving and maintaining a healthy body weight through increased physical activity and a balanced diet,” they also add, “equally important is a supportive environment conducive to behavioural change.”<sup>107</sup> As a result, Muscowpetung and its partners want to provide an environment that promotes positive behavioral change for years to come (see appendix A).

There are efforts being made by Indigenous people all over the world in reconnecting to their land-base; whether it is done through a research project or through daily action—whether it is our rez hunting group, or land-based practitioners in Hawai’i, Indigenous communities have been left to deal with the ongoing affects of colonialism. Land-based research can highlight and promote land-based resurgence that can contribute to the creation of autonomous communities. Corntassel states, “Indigenous resurgence means having the

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 193.

<sup>107</sup> Young et. al, “Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus,” 564.

courage and imagination to envision life beyond the state.”<sup>108</sup> We are at a period in time where we can decide what the future of our Indigenous communities is going to be. These methods of land-based pedagogy, community relationships, place, and story, are essential in ensuring relational accountability is used throughout the research process with Indigenous communities. These research projects and communities serve as examples of how resurgence can be creative, unique, and community-centered to strengthen one’s Indigenous nationhood and create transformational change not only for humans, but for the land. Appendix B highlights how we are trying to improve youth health in all areas with programming by utilizing a holistic approach to Indigenous health through the medicine wheel. Lastly, after our successful hunts I have interviewed Beverly Poitras an Elder (who unfortunately passed on) who has type II diabetes from our community who states as I asked her how wild meat helps her health: “I’d rather eat it, it doesn’t have all the fats a cow has, and the meat is not tough like a cow. Especially old bulls you can boil the meat until kingdom come and it will still be tough. I prefer it.” As a teenage hunter, Beverly was one of the few older people on our reserve that preferred wild game, so I would always drop off prairie chickens, rabbits, and deer meat at her home often.

In this chapter, we focused on a literature review of Indigenous masculinities and feminisms. This was so that we can learn from these two discourses to ensure that we are mentoring respectful Indigenous hunters. In this chapter, we also interviewed female hunters Jordyn, and Shana and got their understanding of what it means to be a female hunter. They both have stated that they are working to destabilize hunting narratives that ‘men should only be hunting.’ This problematic thinking in our communities makes our community members

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<sup>108</sup> Corntassel and Bryce, “Practicing Sustainable Self-Determination,” 89.

subscribe to a binary where in this chapter's interview with 2-spirit hunter Andre Bear, has stated that he has been marginalized in traditionalist spaces. Thus, this is why it is imperative to understand and learn from the discourses of feminism and queer studies so that we are not replicating these problematic systems in our communities.

This chapter focuses on the case study for Muscowpetung which was an agreement between the leadership and myself as a researcher from Muscowpetung. They had agreed that I could organize, write proposals, and research if I kept the health records and organized them into graphs for our health indicators. The diabetes rate is 12% which is very high. Thus, we have to take action now for generational change to occur. The health statistics for Muscowpetung also show that the median age is 33 years. Therefore, it is essential to provide young people with healthy food choices. This also means that we need to work with the youth populations and teach them how to be hunters and providers along with their knowledge on food choices. In summation, I wanted to emphasize how Indigenous food sovereignty in the Plains is much different than a lot of areas because it is dependent on hunting. I also wanted to touch on Saulteaux philosophy and emphasize the importance of how Saulteaux/Cree communities strive for *mino bimaadiziwin*, which means to 'live a good life.' I wanted to get a better understanding of other Indigenous communities and their attempt to enact land-based practices at the community level. This also invokes land-based methodologies such as grounded normativity and everyday acts of resurgence. Indigenous methodology is one that is also rooted in practicality and praxis. We have also looked at Indigenous health and seen that we must approach it from a holistic standpoint as opposed to Western health models. Indigenous health essentially is rooted in our connection/disconnection with land.

To conclude this chapter, I touched on the importance of Saulteaux philosophy and come to the realization that a lot of the Saulteaux methodologies of learning have always been through physical action and learning from our land-base. Our survival was also dependant on your skill as a hunter. If your tribe had good hunters and land-based practitioners, you would be fed. In a way, reconnecting to our land-base and hunting is also the resurgence of utilizing these methodologies that have always existed. I also talked about food sovereignty and like how Dawn Morrison states that “although Indigenous peoples did not originally use the language of food sovereignty, this concept was a 'living reality.’”<sup>109</sup> Thus, the academy is catching up to what Indigenous people have always been doing. We can put the modern word of ‘food sovereignty,’ over our traditional practices. I also wanted to commend a lot of the Plains cultures for their ability and perseverance to change with the food systems. As stated previously, the state decimated the bison populations, and wanted us to become farmers; when we became successful farmers they hindered our success and made us stay on reservations. Thus, the state has always interfered with our food systems, and food sovereignty is the ability to grow, harvest our own foods without state interference.

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<sup>109</sup> Morrison, Dawn, *Food Sovereignty in Canada*, 97

## Appendix A

Long Term Outcomes

Youth demonstrate behavioural change and type II diabetes prevention practices, the percentage of type II diabetes is below 12%

Medium Term Outcomes

Social and physical environments support healthy living and chronic disease prevention in community

Youth have knowledge regarding type II diabetes prevention and prevention practices

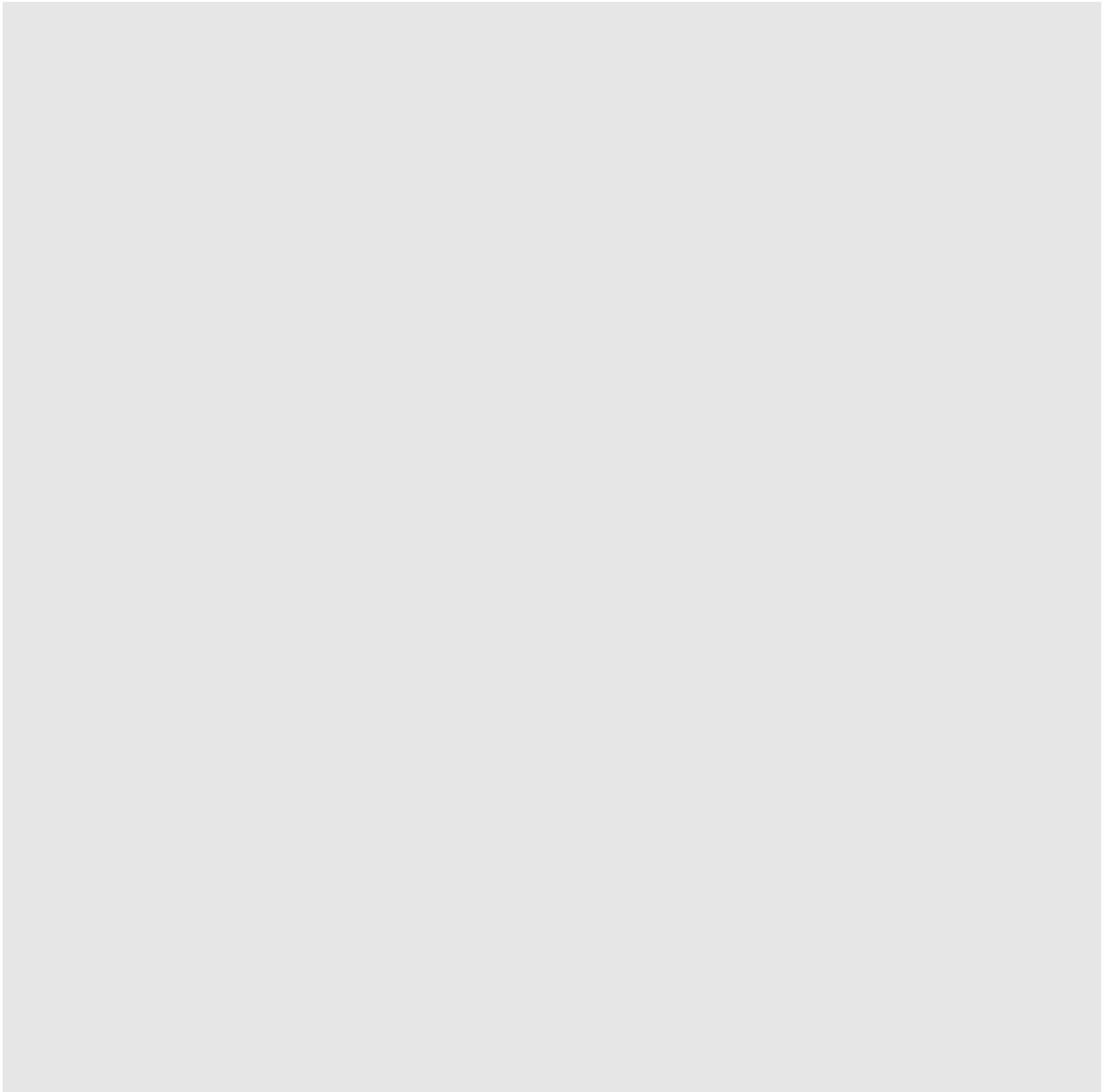
Short Term Outcomes

Youth have access to health promotion, education, physical activities, effective monitoring, and health supports

Inputs

Funding, Expertise, Partnerships, Advisory, Health Resources

## Appendix B



## Chapter 2: Gender, Performance and Land-Based Practices

This chapter imagines and re-envision Indigenous masculinities through land-based practices and hunting. This regeneration must center feminism, queer, and two-spirit narratives and critiques, which recognize white supremacist heteronormative patriarchy as a problematic influence in our communities, affecting all of our lives. Colonial heteropatriarchy brings cis-heterosexual men power and privilege in ways that have become all too common. Leah Sneider believes “Colonial/patriarchy systems rely on gender/sex distinction to create a hierarchy where men rule and maintain dominance over women and as a justification for the conquest of pre-determined ‘weaker’ and thus feminine ‘others’”<sup>110</sup> Critical feminist analyses identify colonial and toxic masculinities and colonial heteropatriarchy as major contributors to experiences of oppression and violence among women and children. Black feminist scholar bell hooks talks about how white patriarchy plays out daily: “Every day on our television screens and in our nation’s newspapers we are brought news of continued male violence at home and all around the world. When we hear that teenage boys are arming themselves and killing their parents, their peers, or strangers, a sense of alarm permeates our culture.”<sup>111</sup> Hooks also argues “the crisis facing men is not the crisis of masculinity, it is the crisis of patriarchal masculinity.”<sup>112</sup> Hooks distinguishes between masculinity and patriarchal masculinity, and hints at the possibility of separating the two. This chapter will dissect the two concepts, masculinity and patriarchal masculinity, and to show that in order to re-envision and regenerate Indigenous masculinities, we need to get rid of the influence of patriarchy, sexism, transphobia, violence, and homophobia. I believe that patriarchal was brought upon our

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<sup>110</sup> Sneider, *Indigenous Men and Masculinities*, 67-68

<sup>111</sup> Hooks, *The Will to Change*, 11.

<sup>112</sup> Hooks, *The Will to Change*, 32.

communities by colonization. It is up to Indigenous men and their families to end it and re-imagine or return to masculinities that serves Indigenous communities. In their work on decolonizing masculinities, Indigenous scholars Anderson and Innes believe that there is “regeneration of positive masculinities currently taking place in many communities that will assist in the restoration of balanced and harmonious relationships.”<sup>113</sup> Though this may be true, there is still a long way to go. Understanding the historical influences shaping masculinity will help us understand how to regenerate a masculinity that is suited for Indigenous nationhood.

I use a Fanonian analysis to identify historical formations, complexes, and subconscious behavioral drives that have been conditioning Indigenous masculinities through the processes of colonialism. I argue that masculinity, including the gender binary itself, can be another dimension of the “arsenal of complexes”<sup>114</sup> that is no longer in need of colonial recognition. I show how Indigenous masculinities have been used to profit the colonizer through labor and entertainment, through the example of sports. I also outline my belief that hunting and land-based practices can be a positive mechanism for those that identify as males to help shape a decolonial masculinity, centered on being a provider. We can use the cultural performance of hunting and other land-based practices to empower and transcend complexes and identity.

Masculinity can be a construct that is fluid, malleable, and able to be shaped to end oppression—for the wellbeing of women, children and people of all genders. Richard Rogers believes “masculinity is culturally relative, continually reconstituted, and a site of struggle,

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<sup>113</sup> Innes and Anderson, “Introduction,” 4

<sup>114</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 14

reflecting and responding to social, economic and political changes.”<sup>115</sup> For those individuals who identify within the gender binary (man/woman), or something beyond the binary as always has been in Indigenous societies, we must regenerate and produce a masculinity that serves community and resurgence. For those who are seeking to regenerate a *traditional masculinity*, we need to analyze how this notion came to be. Kānaka Maoli scholar Ty P. Kāwika Tengan states “I have argued that identity formation through historical discourse depends not only upon which histories are remembered, but also on how and in what contexts these processes take place.”<sup>116</sup> The issue with regenerating a traditional masculinity is that we have no personal experience with what that is. Perhaps it can be exhumed via traditionalism and story. However, this can lead to essentialist stereotypes such as the Hollywood Indian and other romanticized tropes. Māori scholar Brendan Hokowhitu, writing within the New Zealand context, states, “In particular, the collusion of Māori masculine culture with British masculinity produced a stoic Māori patriarchal figure that supposedly represents ‘traditional’ Māori masculinity, but in reality performs a hybridisation of culture comprised of Māori and Victorian masculinities.”<sup>117</sup> Because colonization is an ongoing process that continuously shapes masculinity, we are left to reimagine a hybridity of Indigenous masculinity. Hokowhitu states: “Colonisation, if anything, has been about the invasion of, power to limit and define, space.”<sup>118</sup> In addition to this, “The fact that this space is a construction also means that it can be deconstructed to enable a fluidity in masculinity that will aid Māori men [and other Indigenous men] in attaining balance.”<sup>119</sup> Thus, in creating space to regenerate a

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<sup>115</sup> Rogers, “Deciphering Kokopelli,” 237

<sup>116</sup> Tengan, *Native Men Remade*, 91.

<sup>117</sup> Hokowhitu, *The Silencing of Maori Men*, 71.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 75.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, 75.

masculinity that is rid of patriarchy, sexism, and homophobia, we have to understand what has been conditioning and shaping Indigenous masculinity in a broader sense, so that we can further dissect and examine problematic influences for regeneration purposes. Joyce Green adds “colonialism affects both Indigenous men and women, but not identically.”<sup>120</sup> She also adds “feminist objectives challenge established power relations in both the private sphere—the patriarchally organized home and the dominant form of male-female relationships, particularly marriage—and the public sphere, particularly cultural and economic relationships where gendered norms constrain men and women, but not in the same ways.”<sup>121</sup> All around the world Indigenous men have felt the need to conform to an archetype of masculinity (perhaps out of survival) predicated on the needs of the colonizer to establish the colonies. This plays out in a variety of ways: Indigenous men’s masculinities and bodies were used for warfare, labour, and eventually the proletarianization to establish a colonial economy (as seen in the fur trade). Whether it was the Cree farmers in the Plains, or the Mohawk iron workers, Indigenous men’s bodies—either willingly or forcefully—have been used to build the foundations of colonial societies. Hokowhitu states, “The settler population realized cohabitation was inevitable. In accordance with the assimilation policy of the period, the ‘modern’ Māori appeared capable of performing the rudiments needed to participate at the base levels of colonial society.”<sup>122</sup> Not only has Indigenous masculinity been used for colonial labour, in more recent times, it is used for entertainment through sport. Hokowhitu gives a timeline of how Indigenous masculinity has been conditioned in the colonial process: “In the nineteenth century, Māori masculine physicality was, like the untamed countryside,

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<sup>120</sup> Green, *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*, 5.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, 119.

something to be conquered and civilized; in the twentieth century it was something to be harnessed to provide manual labor for New Zealand's developing colonial nation; in the twenty-first century it has become a spectacle played out by the overachievement of tane (Māori men) on the sports field."<sup>123</sup> A lot of Indigenous men grow up with the belief that they have to embody the physical aspects of their masculinity in order to be accepted. Hokowhitu states, "Males had to be extremely confident in their physicality or face ostracism."<sup>124</sup> It is also believed that the benefit of sport "was one of the few spheres where tane could achieve success and compete with Pakeha [white] men on an 'even play field' and, accordingly, could gain mana in the Pakeha world."<sup>125</sup> Vincent Diaz, from the island of Guam, also talks about this. Diaz states, "I take vicarious pleasure in Polynesian success in football, partly because the football that I learned in Guam was introduced to us by men from Hawai'i and partly because of the early pleasure I obtained from football came from beating the colonizer at his own game."<sup>126</sup> Men who partake in the drama of hypermasculinity—sport—are also in many cases finally getting the chance to *feel*, perhaps for the first time, *emotions, pride, and brotherhood*. Bell Hooks touches on this emotionless masculinity where "men cannot speak their pain in patriarchal culture."<sup>127</sup> Hooks talks about how men are in a space where they cannot turn to anybody to express their emotions: "Men who feel, who love, often hide their emotional awareness for other men for fear of being attacked and shamed."<sup>128</sup> Within colonial patriarchy, only one emotion is allowed to be accepted. Hooks confirms that "There is only

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 259.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 259.

<sup>125</sup> Hokowhitu, "Tackling Maori Masculinity," 260.

<sup>126</sup> Diaz, "Tackling Pacific Hegemonic Formations," 96-97.

<sup>127</sup> Hokowhitu, "Tackling Moari Masculinity," 135.

<sup>128</sup> Hooks, "The Will to Change," 8.

one emotion that patriarchy values when expressed by men; that emotion is anger.”<sup>129</sup> Men's anger was used in the labour force as it is used throughout sport. It is used as fuel on the gridiron, hockey rinks, MMA rings, the military, and anywhere else Indigenous males can be recognized for their physicality. These are the few spheres where men can feel, and momentarily, transcend beyond their emotionless inscribed masculinity. Essentially, there are very few Indigenous men who can take this anger and use it for positive purposes—*this is a fine line*—where anger can lead to problematic manifestations in the lives of individuals around them. Women and children often bear the brunt of the outbursts of deep-seated rage. Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred states, “Indigenous men’s difficulties in comprehending and dealing effectively with the source of their own disempowerment has led to a compounding of the problem for Indigenous women and children, who are frequently the targets of men’s raging manifestations of internalized self-hatred.”<sup>130</sup> When this happens, Indigenous masculinities enter the realm of patriarchal masculinity where anger and emotionless behaviour are commonplace—where they no longer serve our communities, and only further contribute to oppression in the lives of women and children. In addition to this, Gross, Efimoff, Patrick, Hau, Lambert and Smye believe that “when it comes to mental health in particular, Indigenous men are at a greater risk of depression and suicide and suffer a disproportionate burden of other mental health issues compared with the general population;”<sup>131</sup> As a result then, “men suffer in silence far too often.”<sup>132</sup> Peter Mataira states “we are reminded constantly of everything that’s bad about Maori men’s behaviour. We have

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>130</sup> Alfred, “Colonialism and State Dependency,” 43.

<sup>131</sup> Gross, Efimoff, Patrick, Hau, Lambert and Smye, “The DUDES club”, 313

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 313

to radically change that paradigm—and also the practice—and work towards building new images of Maori men as real life ‘nurturing warriors’<sup>133</sup>

Considering these factors, what might provide Indigenous men’s emancipation from colonial patriarchy, mental health, and its physicality? Are we more than just the objectification of physical prowess? How does one envision a futurity of masculinities freed from colonial labor and entertainment? Fanon’s “arsenal of complexes” can help us locate where colonial masculinities are anchored, in order to dislodge them. In colonial states, “the colonial situation—brings about the emergence of a mass of illusions and misunderstandings that only a psychological analysis can place and define.”<sup>134</sup> These complexes become inscribed in our psyches when young men say to themselves, “the white gaze, the only valid one, is already dissecting me. I am fixed.”<sup>135</sup> For colonized individuals, an unworthiness sets in. Fanon states, “And then we were given the occasion to confront the white gaze. An unusual weight descended on us. The real world robbed us of our share.”<sup>136</sup> Masculinity formations can be understood through the “the arsenal of complexes”<sup>137</sup>, which has been shaped and molded to the benefit of the colonizer. In the colonial situation, mass confusion of Indigeneity is evident, “since the criterion for masculinity is precisely how it adapts to society.”<sup>138</sup> As a result, *Indigenous men’s masculinities become something not of our own creation, but out of reaction*. Hokowhitu hints at this: “The masculine indigene “internalises” his subjectivity as lesser, or less human, than the civilised colonizer”<sup>139</sup> — adding another

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<sup>133</sup> Mataira, “Sitting In the Fire,” 36

<sup>134</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 66

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, 95.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, 90

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, 128

<sup>139</sup> Hokowhitu, “The Silencing of Maori Men,” 63.

dimension to an arsenal of complexes that already exists. Through the Indian Residential School system in Canada, the state conditioned Indigenous children to be labourers for its society. It was during this time that “at residential schools, children were imbued with a false consciousness: they were taught to regard white people as superior and to see themselves through the eyes of white disapproval.”<sup>140</sup> If we are inscribed with these complexes, how do we rid of them and regenerate a masculinity and Indigeneity that is free from colonial bondage? Dene scholar Glen Coulthard responds, “According to this view, the colonized must initiate a process of decolonization by first recognizing themselves as free, dignified, and distinct contributors to humanity.”<sup>141</sup> The difficulty in coming to terms with these complexes is that there has to be a process, perhaps an event in a colonized person’s life, where they realize that they will never be equal to the white man and that they will never receive recognition from the colonizer’s subjectifying gaze, reckoning most all with the question: *why have they spent years of their lives and endless energy on a subconscious behavioural drive?* The sad reality is that many Indigenous people will spend most of their lives stuck in this subconscious drive for recognition from the colonizer. In coming to this awareness of their own freedom, a colonized individual may go through an existential breakthrough. Fanon adds, “The colonized subject thus discovers that his life, his breathing and his heartbeats are the same as the colonist’s. He discovers that the skin of a colonist is not worth more than the native’s.”<sup>142</sup> Fanon shows the potential of ridding this complex through self-realization: “The colonized’s revolutionary new assurance stems from this. If, in fact, my life is worth as much as the colonist’s, his look can no longer strike fear into me or nail me to the spot and his voice

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<sup>140</sup> Jobin, “Double Consciousness,” 49.

<sup>141</sup> Coulthard, *Red Skin White Masks*, 43.

<sup>142</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 10.

can longer petrify me. I am no longer uneasy in his presence. In reality, to hell with him.”<sup>143</sup> Furthermore, Coulthard adds, “Fanon claimed that the pathway to self-determination instead lay a quasi-Nietzschean form of personal and collective self-affirmation. Rather than remaining dependent on their oppressors for their freedom and self-worth, Fanon recognized that the colonized must instead struggle to work through their alienation/subjectation against the objectifying gaze and assimilative lure of colonial recognition.”<sup>144</sup> What are the ways in which we must rid ourselves of these complexes and reject colonial recognition? What source of liberation exists in our communities that can be used to transcend complexes? Fanon believes that the answers come from realizations of the self, seeing that the “arsenal of complexes” are just imaginations of the psyche. One can then find the power to transcend complexes from their Indigenous cultures, or in Fanon’s context, *negritude*. Fanon writes, “In a frenzy I excavated my black antiquity [...] the white man was wrong, I was not primitive or subhuman; I belonged to a race that had already been working silver and gold 2,000 years ago.”<sup>145</sup> Glen Coulthard also touches on this in that “Fanon showed how colonized populations, despite the totalizing power of colonialism, are often able to turn these internalized forms of colonial recognition into expressions of Indigenous self-empowerment through the reclamation and revitalization of precolonial social relations and cultural traditions.”<sup>146</sup> Coulthard affirms that cultural revitalization is not the end goal, but a necessary aspect of transcending complexes: “Fanon viewed these practices of Indigenous cultural self-empowerment, or self-recognition, as insufficient for decolonization: they constitute a

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>144</sup> Coulthard, *Red Skin White Masks*, 43

<sup>145</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 109.

<sup>146</sup> Coulthard, *Red Skin White Masks*, 153.

‘means’ but not an ‘end.’”<sup>147</sup> Perhaps when one rejects this inferiority complex, one can turn to their Indigenous cultures and regenerate an Indigeneity—in our case a masculinity—that is in no longer in need of colonial recognition. We can regenerate an Indigeneity and masculinity that is rooted in culture, and better serves the needs of our communities to support and love women and children. Not only this, but Indigenous men must draw upon a sense of ‘self’ and worthiness. According to Mohi rua, Darrin Hodgetts and Otilie Stolte, “Maori men draw upon their culturally-patterned relationships with other people, traditions, objects and places to construct their sense of self”<sup>148</sup> In addition to this, Devi Mucina adds “our social relational actions of regeneration beyond white supremacy and its colonial governance structures are based on our Ubuntu responsibility to our familial bonds”<sup>149</sup> Thus, Indigenous men need their sense of self, family, community and kinship to find our self-worth to transcend complexes, and stereotypes.

### **Indigenous Feminisms**

In order to regenerate an Indigenous masculinity that is rid of inferiority complexes, patriarchy, violence, sexism, and homophobia, we must use the critical analysis and dialectics in the discourses of feminism, two-spirit, and queer studies, which have determined that white heteronormative patriarchal masculinity is an ongoing problem that we must not reproduce. If we are to regenerate a masculinity that meaningfully contributes to the resurgence paradigm, we must take into consideration the critiques and concerns of feminism, two-spirit, and queer discourses. As Nehiyaw scholar Gina Starblanket discusses, “integrating a critical analysis of

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 153.

<sup>148</sup> Mohi, Hodgetts and Stolte, “Maori men: An Indigenous psychological perspective on the interconnected self”, 55

<sup>149</sup> Mucina, Ubuntu, 187

gender into ‘everyday’ including attention to how practices of resurgence can serve to either reproduce or challenge patriarchal power and privilege.”<sup>150</sup> By extension, Starblanket states, “while Indigenous masculinity studies is indebted to Indigenous feminism for its intellectual and analytical foundations, as a burgeoning subfield it can learn a great deal from Indigenous feminism’s capacity to engage in critical analyses of colonial and Indigenous patriarchy.”<sup>151</sup> Starblanket adds, “this will help ensure that those who are committed to grounding resurgence upon ‘traditional’ notions of gender remain mindful and critical of the risks of reproducing the heteronormative ideals they aim to oppose.”<sup>152</sup> Anishinaab scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, in a similar thought, states: “I worry that Indigenous masculinities reinforce[s] the colonial gender binary, centering cisgendered straight men (who are already centred in everything) instead of dismantling heteropatriarchy, and that the binary set up between feminisms and masculinities casts queer people out, so they continually have to come in, because worlds have been constructed by straight Indigenous peoples that leave queer Indigenous thought out.”<sup>153</sup> Taking the above statement into consideration and from the lens of Indigenous masculinities, engagement with an intersectional analysis is integral in identifying how power and privilege resides within the binary. Hokowhitu states “Indigenous masculinities and their associated cultural and performances in particular can and should be treated as a largely untapped rubric for examining the propagation of power in the colonial context.”<sup>154</sup> Accordingly, “Indigenous masculinity, in serving two essentialized binary masters (i.e., colonized/colonizer and men/women), creates a model for looking at power

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<sup>150</sup> Starblanket, “Being Indigenous Feminists,” 35-36.

<sup>151</sup> Starblanket, “Being Indigenous Feminists,” 36.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>153</sup> Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*,

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 83.

within the colonial context where the two essentialized notions associated with the dominance of colonized man over the Indigenous man, and man over woman.”<sup>155</sup> Which ultimately creates “the ambivalent figure of the Indigenous heterosexual patriarch. Both oppressor and oppressed.”<sup>108</sup> According to Joanne Barker “It is a racially gendered and sexed snapshot, a still image of a movingly malleable narrative of Indigenous womanhood/femininity and manhood/masculinity that reenacts Indigenous people’s lack of knowledge and power over their own culture and identity in an inherently imperialist and colonialist world.”<sup>156</sup> Now that we have understood how Indigenous masculinity benefits from power and privilege, we must reimagine a masculinity that no longer wields its power to oppress women, children, two-spirit and queer individuals. The solution is predicated on queer and two-spirited critical analyses’ critiques that reshape Indigenous masculinity so that it no longer fits within the colonial/patriarchal binary—but into a *space* that serves the community and a resurgence of responsibilities and community kinship. This space is hinted at by Hokowhitu, who states, “It is important for Māori men to realize that the search for balance lies within their own culture and beyond the space defined for them by others. Many Māori men already locate their masculinity beyond this space, affirming that the imagined space of dominant discourses can be transcended. [To give rise to] Composers, writers, artists and filmmakers.”<sup>157</sup> When we are no longer in need of colonial recognition or feels the need to mold to an archetype of masculinity predicated on physicality, we are regenerating a new masculinity. A masculinity that is created by us (two-spirit, queer, women, and men) and not for us; a masculinity that is inclusive to all genders, including individuals who identify with masculinity. Indigenous

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<sup>155</sup> Hokowhitu, *The Silencing of Maori Men*, 75.

<sup>156</sup> Barker, Joanne, *Critically Sovereign*, 10.

<sup>157</sup> Hokowhitu, *The Silencing of Maori Men*, 75.

societies held gender fluidity that transcended the colonial binary.

Jean-Gay Goulet gives evidence of this: “Dene Tha, like many Northern Athapaskans, construct gender identities that transcend the male/female, man/woman dichotomies so familiar to Euro- Americans.”<sup>158</sup> Goulet also provides an example related to familial labour and gendered roles— “households were expected to survive on their own, as were adults, male or female. More than a strict sexual division of labour, autonomy and competent management in the bush all year around were emphasized for both males and females.”<sup>159</sup> In the Navajo context, Wesley Thomas states that there are “five traditional gender categories.”<sup>160</sup> According to Simpson, “The gender binary was also reinforced through the Indian Act: only men could run for chief and council until 1950, marriage was defined in a heterosexual, monogamous way, and the rules for status and property were gendered and binarized.”<sup>161</sup> If we are to use ‘tradition,’ we need to prioritize and be resurgent of the complexity of *these* fluid genders, identities, and sexualities, that existed before the colonial imposition of the binary. Tengan states, “The decolonization of Indigenous masculinities will require not only a restructuring of the way in which we see ourselves, but also the ways in which we perform ourselves and be ourselves.”<sup>162</sup> Colonial binaries will never fathom Indigenous societies’ complex genders. In regenerating positive masculinities, we need to keep in mind of the complexities of Indigenous societies in terms of gender fluidity. There is a major restorative possibility for Indigenous masculinities, in fact, for our communities: women, children, and queer-gendered peoples have been waiting for it. As we have seen,

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<sup>158</sup> Goulet, “*The Northern Athapaskan ‘Berdache’ Reconsidered,*” 45.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, 53.

<sup>160</sup> Thomas, “Navajo Cultural Constructions of Gender and Sexuality,” 158.

<sup>161</sup> Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 127.

<sup>162</sup> Tengan, “(En)gendering Colonialism,” 251.

masculinity is a social structure which can be fluid and be enacted by anyone through performance. We can apply this understanding to cultural performances, such as hunting, which can destabilize hegemonic 'roles' that are present in some Indigenous communities. We will explore how either men and women are partaking in land-based practices to empower themselves and their communities. Throughout my research, I interviewed several Indigenous hunters and land-based practitioners who share their take on roles and responsibilities in their community.

In a conversation about gender and cultural performance with woman land-based practitioner Jordyn Burnouf, she shares her take on roles and responsibilities in the Northern Saskatchewan bush:

**Shane:** *What does being a 'woman hunter/land-based practitioner' signify for yourself, and your community?*

**Jordyn:** I feel a deeper sense of independence and pride in my abilities, especially as a young woman where any expectation of living this way don't necessarily exist anymore. I feel a sense of urgency to want to teach more young women to feel the absolute power and strength you feel when you chop your own wood, build your own fire, and harvest and prepare your own food from the bush. For my community, I think it might elicit a sense of pride in knowing that the influence from Elders from my community, my family, and even the school I attended has guided me here. I come from an area where culture is defined by our strong connection to the land, to hunting and gathering. When I travel to other nations, I hear song and dance, I see powwow and ceremony. Up north where I grew up, we have a very rich Metis history and strong ties to the Catholic church which I feel has negatively impacted the practice of

powwow, ceremony, and many of the traditions that were practiced by my Capans (grandmothers) and those before them. Hunting, gathering, and language are things we did not lose, which is why I think the significance of these practices are a part of a much more complex web that is our Indigenous identity.

**Shane:** *How does being a woman hunter/land-based practitioner differ from that of a 'man'?*

**Jordyn:** It doesn't. People just see it that way because of the perception of a woman's threshold or ability. The only difference is the responsibility of both women and men to eliminate these stereotypes and limitations we place on women in these roles.

**Shane:** *What are your thoughts on gender 'roles' in your community? For example, men should be hunters, men should be doing this, etc?*

**Jordyn:** I think this is just silly. Sometimes I get hurt trying to disprove this silly theory. One interesting thing I would love to hear, is how our culture has evolved to include women. We see the impact on the role of women due to the colonial systems that continue to oppress women and perpetuate a world where women are an afterthought. Pre-contact communities had roles based on survival and tactics to help their communities thrive, given the environmental and societal factors that governed their nations. Women were sacred, women's roles were different than men but not less than. Today we see that women still have the caregiver role, but kinship and family-oriented societies have long been obsolete. Our societies are built on capitalism, resource exploitation, and exponential growth at the cost of our environment and the wellbeing of all people, but most heavily impacted are Indigenous nations. I think once we move back to realize the value and power of kinship and the customs

associated with these roles, then we can actually begin to move forward. A part of this is the expression of our cultural evolution in terms of communal roles. We must evolve our vision to include women, men, two-spirited and all beings into our understanding of contributors of existence.

In I and Jordyn's conversation, you can see that she is actively promoting the lifestyle of women being hands-on and not worrying about 'roles' and expectations of genders. She is also in a mentoring role with young women to learn these sets of skills. Jordyn also talks about the importance of how in pre-colonial times, there was more so a responsibility on survival. I liked how she said that our culture has changed to adapt to recognizing women's responsibilities such as hunting.

Another example that I am seeing is in the conversation with Shana Pasapa, a Nakota winyan (woman) from the Whitebear First Nation. She reflects on roles and responsibilities in her community and being a woman hunter:

**Shane:** *What does being a 'woman hunter' signify for yourself, and your community?*

**Shana:** I feel like my perspective as a woman is different than that of a man's for hunting. I listen to conversations and the love/compassion for the animal isn't talked about, it's the size, level of difficulty, the age, the techniques used—which is all just as important. But being a woman, I appreciate all that this life has to offer and consider that in my hunting. I was once shamed by an older woman in my community; she told me women aren't supposed to be hunting. My grandmas were hunters, my uncle taught me to hunt. I grew up around hunters all my life. I think it's a colonial act to try bringing down one another. Pre-contact, everyone did business through trading and social obligations [which] were like currency. Everyone had something to offer in

the community, everyone looked after one another. If you were a good hunter, you could trade with others who were not. If you were not a good hunter, but a good butcher or sewer, you would provide that service to trade. Being a woman hunter, I am providing for my family and community. I am continuing traditions that were passed down to me and right now it is our responsibility to practice our hunting rights.

**Shane:** *How does being a woman hunter differ from that of a man?*

**Shana:** As a woman, I speak for myself, not all women. My feelings towards hunting is different than some men. I offer love and compassion to all that is involved in killing an animal. I see it as a transfer of life; my animals continue on through the lives that eat it. Being a woman doesn't make me different than a man hunter. Other than it may take me longer to haul it out, I feel that the intention to provide for our families is our ultimate goal. My perspective in life may be different but I have met other men who see hunting this way too. I have grandmothers who hunt so it's not weird for me to see other women hunters or make me think of myself as that much different. I know it can be physically difficult for other women to hunt, kill or be around animals. Exposure at a young age was a gift to me.

**Shane:** *What are your thoughts on gender 'roles' in your community? For example, men should be hunters, men should be doing this, etc?*

**Shana:** I think I just answered that in the last question, although I think women should get more credit for providing for their families and men should acknowledge their ability to provide and contribute to the community.

Shana also touches on women's perspectives on hunting which is different than that of men. She talks about the compassion and respect for the animal's life. She also touches on

that in being a part of an Indigenous community, everyone has their skills and strengths that were used to contribute the collective of the tribe which is similar to Leah Sneider's 'complementarity' as discussed previously.

In conversation with Isaiah Gilson, from the Kluane First Nation in the Yukon, he touches on gender and responsibilities in his home community, which heavily relies on hunting for their survival as they are located in the far North:

**Shane:** *How do gender 'roles' shape your community? For example, men should do this, men should do that, etc?*

**Isaiah:** Gender roles have played a light role in how we conduct ourselves on the land. Much of modern society's views have affected us, but traditionally, men and women had free range to do what they had to. Example, if some Cree communities do not let women handle drums. In the Yukon, that has been non-existent, as to give an idea where Yukon Indigenous peoples are at. Men will more so hunt, do more of the physical labor, women will take care of the camp and such—it's not uncommon for that work to be switched around. More so it comes down to teamwork. My eldest sister and brother-in-law live in the bush full time; they share the workload.

I am starting to see a common theme in Indigenous communities, in that, there are considering being more accepting of genders and different types of labor. In essence, they are what Isaiah calls sharing 'the workload.'

The last interview that I had wanted to share was in a phone conversation with Nehiyaw law student and two-spirit youth leader Andre Bear from the Little Pine First Nation, in Saskatchewan. I believe that two-spirit hunters can really offer insight from both sides of the gender binary because of their intersectionality. We discuss how gender roles can be

problematic in our cultures, and emphasize more so on the survivance and responsibilities one should have regardless of biology:

**Shane:** *I just wanted to get your take as someone who identifies as two-spirited and who could be a man—or whatever you decide to identify as—and get your feedback on gender and roles in the community. What do you identify as, in those terms? Your pronouns?*

**Andre:** Well, I identify as he/him. I identify as a two-spirit, I guess. Yeah, those are my pronouns. Do you want me to go in-depth?

**Shane:** *No, that's fine. I'm asking your perspective on what you think about that. For instance, I interviewed women hunters, right? All this time, they're always given slack. There are even women that said, "Oh, that's not your job. That's a man's role," type of thing, whereas, they could be more masculine. Then of course, there are men that are more feminine. It's getting in-depth on the intersectionality, I guess, of all of these type of roles that we have in our community where they force us to pick a side. Yeah, I was just getting feedback on people's perspectives about that. I'm sure you've come into that in ceremony, especially with traditionalists where they're like, "Oh, this is a man's job," . . . What's your perspective on all of that stuff?*

**Andre:** My perspective is that it gets complicated when we try to put white lenses, colonized lenses, on Indigenous practices and roles. When we try to compartmentalize our roles as Indian people, that's where people get caught up in sexism and masculinity or all of that kind of stuff. But in reality, I think that our people had no concept of these distinctions between what's right and what's wrong for a person to do based on their gender. I think that it's fluid. It's always been on a spectrum. I don't necessarily

believe that there was such a thing as somebody that was like gay or lesbian or anything like that. I think that there is a different role for survival that needed to be in place because, first and foremost, the most important thing for our people was survival.

**Shane K:** *Yeah.*

**Andre:** In my situation, as a two-spirit man, regardless of whether or not I'm attracted to women, I still have an obligation to my people, to my family, to my lineage, to bear children. I still have to have kids, even though I'm not with a woman. That's law. That's how it needs to be. But there's other men two-spirited that likely that won't be able to have any kids like that. That's where it comes in that their role is to look after the orphans or the kids that don't have parents, those two-spirit people that can't bear children.

**Shane:** *Yeah.*

**Andre:** Me, I don't have a problem. I can bear children if I need to. That's a responsibility in itself that I need to make life. I need to bear Indian children that are going to know their language, their ceremonies, and their culture. That's part of my job because that's what the creator gave me. I can do that. That's my responsibility now and I need to use it right and use it properly. Despite the fact that I'm two-spirited, it's still my job. I should bear kids because that's what makes our nationhood strong. That's survival of our people. If I was to die without ever bearing children, even though I could, it's almost like, "Okay well, does my family's legacy end with me?" Those are the things we have to think about because our numbers of our people, our survival, is extremely important. . . .

I was concerned when I first went into a ceremony and they were splitting up the men and the women. They were talking about relationships and in the teepee I was in, all they did was talk about women. I gave that elder tobacco and I told them, I said, "I don't think I'm supposed to be in this teepee," I said, "I don't like women. None of this conversation is helpful to me." I said, "Maybe I have to go into the other teepee because they're talking about husbands and being with men." That elder asked me, he said, "Well, were you born as a man or were you born as a woman?" I said, "I was born as a man." He said, "Well, this is your teepee." I had to really think about that and think about my role as a man, because I still bear the body of a man. I still bear the responsibilities of a man. I'm a provider, I'm a caregiver, protector. I still have to hunt and do all of these things because that's what the creator gave me and that's how creator made me.

**Shane K:** *Yeah.*

**Andre:** As for women, if they didn't have a man around, if they weren't able to hunt, they would die or their kids would die. When people try to say, "Women can't hunt or do these things or be protectors," it's just idiotic because it doesn't make any sense.

**Shane K:** *Another thing too is what I always talk about, my dad's grandmother, Elsie Gambler, was the one, she was widowed. She did all of the hunting and cutting wood and stuff like that. She lived by herself and she trapped. She's the one who taught my dad how to hunt and trap, which later got passed down to me. If it wasn't for a woman that hunted, then I wouldn't be a hunter at all to, you know what I mean?*

**Andre:** Yeah. It's not about gender roles. It's really not about that. It's about survival and the same sense that she needed to know how to hunt and survive. That's the same

sense for me. In order for my legacy to live on even though I'm not straight, I'll still need to bear kids to have a legacy. It's got to happen. It's about survival. It's not about what makes people comfortable based on their gender stereotypes and their roles because that's the problem that white society influences us that we need to be and think a certain type of way.

**Andre:** Maybe we've seen women wearing skirts a long time ago, but when the way Sylvia McAdam talks about it, have you ever tried to walk through the bush in a ribbon skirt? Those are the serious questions because our people were very smart. They weren't stupid. They did everything based on survival. Women weren't able to walk through the bush in this skirt. It doesn't make any sense that they would wear something like that in the bush.

**Shane K:** *Yeah.*

**Andre:** That's the way we have to think about those things is that everything is based on survival and the different roles that people have, there are societies that aren't talked about anymore. The Dakota they call that . . . What that is, is it's a sacred society for people that bore two souls. They're people that were born with a female soul and a male soul. It's a female grandmother and a male grandfather that lives inside of that person. If this person needed help, they would go talk to a medicine man. That medicine man, if they were a man or a woman, or if the person that was asking for help was a man or a woman, let's say, if it's a man, and he's asking this medicine man for help. That medicine man prayed to them, that medicine man would ask that person's grandfather, "Come in and help your grandchild. He's asking for help. He needs fostering."

What that means is that if we don't know who we are, that's where we really get mixed up because how are we supposed to know whether or not we have two souls if we aren't connected like that spiritually? Because our people were a spiritual people. If we don't have that spiritual connection to our ancestors and who we are, we're going to get confused and we're going to stay lost. That's where we're at right now.

There's a spiritual journey that people need to make in order to understand who they are, where they come from and where they sit in our circle, because every single person, no matter who they are, has a place in our circle together. That's how our society lived. That's how we ran things. It was all based-on survival, it was all based on the land. If something doesn't make sense, I don't think our people would do it. The women needed to know how to hunt. They needed to know those things so their kids could live and the same with the kids. They would also need to know how to hunt. They would need to do these things, and the men. Everybody had to know how to do those things.

**Shane K:** *Yeah.*

**Andre:** We had rites of passage. Every child for when they came of a certain age, let's say they were 14, 15 years old, they had to go on their vision quest. The women had to go in these moon time ceremonies. Everybody had to have these rites of passage that would build their spiritual connection, so they didn't get lost. They had an idea of who they are, their purpose, where they come from, who their ancestors are and what their purpose is in life, what the creator needs them to do. When you think about roles and responsibilities and who we are as Indian people, that spiritual context of the conversation is actually what's most important. It's the core to our people. Those

societies of two-spirit people, nobody talks about them because nobody knows about them because nobody knows who they are because those rites passage aren't being followed. People throw around the word two-spirit a lot. A lot of people claim that term two-spirits because it makes them feel comfortable, but I've met gay people who don't have two spirits.

**Andre:** There's people that are probably not even gay or lesbian or anything, but they still have two spirits. It's not about a sexual preference. It's about what gifts the creator gave you when you were born. That's what this term two-spirit is trying to refer to, but people don't understand that.

As you can see in this conversation, Andre touches on the spectrum of gender and responsibilities instead of classifying it into roles, which sometimes brings in a gender binary that can be marginalizing to queer-gendered peoples in spaces such as ceremony, or other cultural performances. I had wanted to highlight his perspective because in the era of decolonization amongst our peoples in our cultural and ceremonial circles, two-spirited analyses give rise to problematic influences as seen from an intersectional lens. I have heard countless stories of how in ceremony and traditional spaces that two-spirited people are further marginalized and oppressed, which should be the last place that they should experience this. A queer analysis also comes from an intersectional perspective that is different than that of someone who identifies on a gendered binary.

Shana and Jordyn believe that these 'roles' are sometimes enforced by individuals in our communities by both men and women, and women are not seen as taking credit for their labor in the hunting process. In some spaces in our communities, a lot of traditionalists enforce a binary on our community members where I have heard my LGBTQ friends feel

even further marginalized in these circumstances, where they must conform to either a ‘man/women,’ and nothing beyond that.

I believe that complementarity can be a catalyst for this in our communities, to shift from essentialist notions of roles to responsibilities. According to Leah Sneider, “Complementarity does not enforce strict binaries but, rather, recognizes specifically delineated gender-based communal responsibilities; as long as individuals contribute to the community, their sex in relation to or classified by their gender is ultimately irrelevant,”<sup>163</sup> which I think is a proper direction regarding responsibilities in the community amongst gender. In these interviews, these women are the ones who are taking the lead and dismantling hetero-normativity of notions of labor and proving that women can do it to.

If Indigenous cultural practices and land-based practices are to be revived and maintained, we have to consider how marginalizing these ‘roles’ and expectations of gender can be. It goes to show that in our Indigenous societies, we have always cared more so about what one has to offer, and not necessarily confirming to a gender with a set of roles. I believe that in most recent times, because of the residential school system in Canada, and religion, it has put strenuous binaries in our Indigenous communities. I believe that land-based practices such as hunting, are an insight into how fluid our gender labor has always been.

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<sup>163</sup> Sneider, *Complementary Relationships*, 64.

### Chapter 3: Kiyohsēwin

In this chapter, I would like to explore the concepts of Indigenous hunting through story while interviewing several Indigenous hunters. Kiyohsēwin is the Saulteaux word for big game hunter, where the majority of the hunters in Saskatchewan hunt Elk or Moose. Antawēncikēwin means hunting smaller game like rabbits and prairie chickens. When becoming a hunter in the Plains you evolve from Antawēncikēwin to Kiyohsēwin. This chapter focuses on Indigenous hunting and how it differs than that of sport hunting. I also interview some of our ‘rez hunters’ to get their insight on the responsibility that they have accepted. Indigenous hunting involves ceremony and respect which will be highlighted later in the chapter. In contrast, I look at the historical ideology of sport hunting which has its roots in Europe and review the literature which supports its sports hunting ideology. Spanish philosopher and author, Jose Ortega Y Gasset’s book, *Meditations on Hunting*, looks at how sport hunting is rooted in European thought. He states, “The English have initiated a form of hunting in which all these conflicts of conscience are cleverly eluded: it is a matter of having the hunt end, not with a capture or death of the animal, but rather with taking the game’s picture.”<sup>164</sup> Ortega also adds “to the sportsmen the death of the game is not what interests him; that is not his purpose. What interests him is everything that he had to do to achieve that death—that is, the hunt.”<sup>165</sup> By extension, “what he is after is having to win it, to conquer the surly brute through his own effort and skill with all the extras that this carries with it: the immersion in the countryside, the healthfulness of the exercise, the distraction from his job, and so on and so forth.”<sup>166</sup> Ortega, in his attempt to get a deeper

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<sup>164</sup> Ortega, *Meditations on Hunting*, 106.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 111.

understanding of hunting states “the essence of sportive hunting is not raising the animal to the level of man, but something much more spiritual than that: a conscious and almost religious humbling of man which limits his superiority and lowers him toward the animal.”<sup>167</sup> I can understand this partly, due to my hunting experiences where the hunt was quite the journey, whether it was running into a woodland alpha bison, or hiking four miles to call in a bull elk and then walk back to camp in the dark—every hunt is a journey, of success or failure, every hunt is pedagogy. I will be interviewing several Indigenous hunters to get their sense of hunting, including a prominent Cree Elder and get their take on Indigenous hunting. Greg Gillespie believes that sport hunting in North America especially when settlers first came and started hunting that “hunting abroad, was indubitably more dangerous, exciting, invigorating, and affirming than it was at ‘home.’”<sup>168</sup> By extension, “wild animals were abundant when Europeans first came to new world territories, and many of the Indigenous beasts that the newcomers encountered were immensely intimidating in size/or ferocity.”<sup>169</sup> As you can see, sport hunting enjoys the ‘thrill of the chase.’

In this chapter, I demonstrate that Indigenous hunting is a far different experience than sport hunting in terms of preparation, the amount of thought, survival, respect, and spiritual undercurrents and cultural significance and relationship to place. Pueblo scholar, Larry Littlebird states “For my people, hunting was never a sport. It has always been a spiritual discipline.”<sup>170</sup> Littlebird also adds, “.. this deeper understanding is the difference between heartfelt hunting and heartless killing. Hunting is living fully. Killing is existing destructively. This is a choice made

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<sup>167</sup> Ortega, *Meditations on Hunting*, 111.

<sup>168</sup> Gillespie, *Hunting For Empire, Narrative of Sport in Rupert’s Land, 1840-70*, XIV

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid*, XIV

<sup>170</sup> Littlebird, *Hunting Sacred Everything Listens* 41.

for embracing life or death. Living fully a hunter learns to accept and gracefully release his own dying.”<sup>171</sup> We will contrast Indigenous hunting with sport hunting, to prove the difference in ideology and purpose. The majority of sport hunters are in similar thought with Edward Reid, in his sport-hunting ideology stating “the public seems to accept that Native hunters have a special knowledge and rapport with wildlife. Many non-Native hunters reject that special or exclusive understanding because, I believe, we feel every bit as knowledgeable about, involved with, passionate about, and respectful to the game we pursue.”<sup>172</sup> Based on interviews and my review of the literature, I will examine how sport hunting often lacks connection with the land, and has no relational accountability or meaningful spiritual significance, at least in comparison to Indigenous hunters.

I interviewed a prominent Nehiyaw (Cree) Elder and former Chief to give context to Creation stories that have the origins of hunting involved with them, and also, the significance of why we put down tobacco when we take an animal’s life. These are stories that talk about the very first hunter in the Cree cosmology, and gives essence, that life as we know it is a part of a bigger cycle of life and death – and sometimes hunting is a part of that.

We will be exploring the ideologies of Indigenous society, and settler society which gives rise to their differences which is seen and acted out in the performances of hunting. These two different worldviews: one of respect and the other of opportunity and sport; Europeans have philosophical forefathers that have ingrained a duality and separation amongst human and animals. How this appears in the colonial psyche is through *Cartesian dualism*, where Soviet anthropologist Rane Willerslev states “These hierarchically ordered dualisms largely arose from

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>172</sup> Reid, *The Culture of Hunting in Canada*, 206.

Cartesian metaphysics some three centuries ago and have had a potent and lasting impact on how we think about ourselves in relation to nonhuman animals.”<sup>173</sup> By extension, “The separation of mind and matter, which is so central to Cartesian philosophy, and the detail of a rational mind to animals fed into the world of science at large.” According to ecologist David Abram, “This assumption has its source in Rene Descartes’s well-known separation of the thinking mind, or subject, from the material world of things and objects.”<sup>174</sup> Thus, this created a separation of ourselves and animals and eventually, all of life. This disconnection has caused a series of problems throughout history. Because the majority of society is *disconnected from our land*, we decontextualized the way we view land, animals, and all of life—it is the very reason the state and the majority of Canadians favor neoliberal policies of pipeline expansions over the wellbeing of land, waterways and life. In contrast, Vine Deloria and Daniel Wildcat believe “familiarity with the personality of objects and entities of the natural world enabled Indians to discern immediately where each living being had its proper place and what kinds of experiences that place allowed, encouraged, and suggested. And knowing places enabled people to relate to the living entities inhabiting it.”<sup>175</sup> Would we feel different if we had to drink out of the source of water that a pipeline was running through? We currently live in what David Abram calls a synthetic heaven (or haven), where: “technology can also, and easily, be used as a way to avoid direct encounter, as a shield—etched with lines of code or cryptic jargon—to ward off whatever frightened, as a synthetic heaven or haven in which to hide out from the distressing ambiguity of the real.”<sup>176</sup> This disconnected conditioning happens in childhood, where: “The broken bond

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<sup>173</sup> Willerslev, *Soul Hunters*, 13.

<sup>174</sup> Abrams, *Spell of the Sensuous*, 32.

<sup>175</sup> Deloria and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 2-3.

<sup>176</sup> Abrams, *Becoming Animal*, 7.

between the child and the living land will later be certified, and rendered permanent, by her active entrance into an economy that engages the land primarily as a stock of resources to be appropriated for our own, exclusively human, purposes.”<sup>177</sup> It is no more apparent if we are to walk down a university hallway, or out in the public, and see everyone is in utter rapport with their smart phones. I ask, how do we break this synthetic heaven, and regain our sensuous selves that is more aware of our surroundings? We have to engage with our land-base in reflexive and concrete ways, where there is an intelligence and pedagogy derived from the land, where all animals, except humans, are attuned to. Abram adds, “the sensuous world—the creaturely world directly encountered by our animal senses—is commonly assumed to be a secondary, derivative reality understood only by reference to more primary domains that exist elsewhere, behind the scenes.”<sup>178</sup> Indigenous people were living harmoniously with all of life which gives rise to our ideologies to respect all of creation, that ensured that we had ceremonies to honor the Creator and all of life. Our traditions and oral histories and stories speak to the spirituality and respect for life that was ever so abundant. Abram states “The propensity of our Indigenous brothers and sisters to consult the animate earth around them, listening close to the land—carefully watching the patterned movements of other animals, attending to their diverse songs, signs, and gestures—all this is an obvious consequence of the expansive experience of language as an obvious consequence of the expansive experience of language as a property that belongs to all things, and not solely to humankind.”<sup>179</sup> With the above aforementioned, there is a real invitation for us to experience the human body and its senses in the wilderness, to go beyond our technological distractions, which is seen in Indigenous societies throughout the world—we will

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>178</sup> Abrams, *Becoming Animal*, 5

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, 175.

examine an Indigenous hunting tribe which gives a pragmatic example of this. In regard to sport hunting, I argue that Cartesianism cannot fathom beyond its own duality, where Indigenous ontologies, and performances of hunting may sit.

### **Cree Hunters: Drums, Song, Dance, Dreams, and Faith**

To hunt Indigenously, is to learn to be human again. It is a praxis of getting to know the land and animals again, it is learning the language of nature. Indigenous peoples have been hunting since time immemorial, in fact, they were dependent on it for their survival. I will show how from historical accounts how Indigenous hunters (Cree, Dene) have used song, dance, and dreams to aid their hunts which adds precedence to the spiritual undercurrents of Indigenous hunting.

Daniel Laxer in his book *Listening to the Fur Trade*, highlights how Indigenous hunters used singing and praying as part of their everyday ritual which were experienced by the fur traders. Laxer notes “fur traders observed Indigenous hunting and healing song traditions,”<sup>180</sup> and that “these practices whether they were Anishinaabe, Cree, Dene, or other, sought to engage with unseen forces through song. Indigenous songs were conduits to harnessing and manifesting spiritual power seen as essential to the success of hunting and healing endeavours.”<sup>181</sup> The fur traders noted the significance of hunting songs which were used frequently. Laxer adds “hunters used singing in their preparations with a rattle or drum accompaniment to ‘conjure’ the hunt and facilitate its success. Among the Dene, the animals, particularly the caribou, held a place of great importance in song and stories”<sup>182</sup> By extension, “hunting was interwoven into the cultural fabrics of diverse Indigenous communities. To Algonquian speakers, many song and dance types

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<sup>180</sup> Laxer, *Listening to the Fur Trade*, 158

<sup>181</sup> Laxer, *Listening to the Fur Trade*, 158-159

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid*, 159.

referred to or described animals.”<sup>183</sup> In the era of 1760-1840, the fur traders had noted that Indigenous hunters “when the act of hunting is examined in its totality from conception and preparation to completion and processing, it becomes obvious that it was about much more than killing an animal. A hunter was supported by his community, and he was expected to provide for it. Sharing meat reinforced kinship ties and group solidarity.”<sup>184</sup> In the writings of David Thompson who worked as a fur trader alongside the Cree in the 1780-90s, stated that the Cree hunters “have recourse to dreams and other superstitions.”<sup>185</sup> According to Lynn Whidden, drums were aided in the hunt: “In an 1823 letter to his father, fur-trade clerk George Nelson described his experiences with the Cree and Ojibwe of Lac la Ronge in Northern Saskatchewan. Throughout the text Nelson mentions the rattle, and provides two lengthy discussions of the drum. Both instruments were used to ensure a successful hunt.”<sup>186</sup> Whidden also adds “the Cree hunters did not think of their drums and rattles as musical instruments but as integral parts of their hunting life. These were tools that facilitated communication with the world of unseen living beings. When he wished the drum to talk to him, the Cree hunter sang into it, merging his voice with the drum vibrations.”<sup>187</sup> This gives rise and the importance of how Indigenous hunting has spiritual undercurrents that are far different than sport hunting. Laxter adds “hunting songs were employed to ensure success in the hunt by interacting with unseen spiritual forces.”<sup>188</sup> Not only did Indigenous hunters offer tobacco as a sign of respect for the animals, they also conducted ceremonies around the gratitude for an animal. For example, the Goose

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 159.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid, 159

<sup>185</sup> Thompson, *The Writing of David Thompson*, 105

<sup>186</sup> Whidden, *Essential Song*, 17

<sup>187</sup> Ibid, 19

<sup>188</sup> Laxter, *Listening to the Fur Trade*, 162.

Dance, which was “in the early 1980s, a few Manitoban elders could remember the settings for the the songs and drums and give detailed accounts of the once-important ceremony known as the the goose dance,”<sup>189</sup> whereby, “this Cree ceremony showed respect and love for the spirit being of the geese. These geese were commemorated by the smoking pipe, by prayers, and by proper handling of ducks and geese.”<sup>190</sup> Other forms of respect are utilized by using all parts of the animal, Swampy Cree writer Ken Carriere from Northern Saskatchewan near Cumberland House accounts how his father would hunt moose: “he usually hunted moose if he saw fresh tracks in the snow. If successful, he would kill the moose, dress the kill, and take the choice parts—such as the upper part of the digestive tract below the stomach (mitagisiy), the heart (mitch), kidenys (totokosiya), liver (oskon), tongue (mitenaniy), and hindquarters (osoganiya)—and add them to the load on his toboggan sled.”<sup>191</sup> I have noticed that Indigenous hunters eat or utilize almost all parts of the animals that they hunt, as a sign of respect.

We will also look to and explore in Northern Siberia, with a group of hunters that use *mimesis*, to lure their animals. This also gives rise to a very complex preparation that is involved before one goes out and hunts. This group is considered the “Yukaghirs, [which is] a small group of Indigenous hunters on the Upper Kolyma River in northeastern Sibera.”<sup>192</sup> In the Yukaghir world “persons can take a variety of forms, of which a human being is only one. They can also appear in the shape of river, trees, soul, and spirits, but above all it is mammals that Yukagirs see as ‘other-than-human-persons.’”<sup>193</sup> In essence, “this capacity to take on the appearance and

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 20

<sup>190</sup> Ibid, 20

<sup>191</sup> Carriere, *Witigowa*, 87

<sup>192</sup> Willerslev, *Soul Hunters*, 2.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 2.

viewpoint of another being is one of the key aspects of being a person.”<sup>194</sup> This is done by mimesis: “the nature that cultures uses to create second nature, the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, explore difference, yield into and become Other.”<sup>195</sup> Alluding to what Abram calls “becoming animal,” this is part of the Yukagirs hunting process. This reasoning for this, according to Yugakir cosmology, is that their hunting is inextricably linked to their ancestor’s cycle of life and death (which is similar to the Cree as well as shall be discussed)— their cosmology believes “humans and animals are locked in a pattern of mutual replication” and that “animals and their associated spiritual beings are thus said to take on human shapes and live lives analogous to those of humans when in their own lands and households.”<sup>196</sup> Ultimately, then, “the Yukaghir hunter, when out hunting, is both hunter and animal, and within the human community he is not simply himself but also a reincarnated deceased relative.”<sup>197</sup> The anthropologist (with his Cartesian perspective) who observed the Yukaghir believes that “animism is essentially an erroneous mental operation.”<sup>198</sup> However, for the Yukaghir, mimeism is the pragmatic expression of animism, which is done throughout the hunting process amongst their culture. Once the animal is hunted, meat is distributed which is an important task in their society, “its meat is distributed among village families as a key expression of community ties and is exchanged for fuel and other necessities in the district centre of Zyrianka.”<sup>199</sup> By extension, “Elk meat is also considered to be food par excellence, the focal dish of feasts and family meals. Because it comes from a large, strong animals, it is thought to be a source of strength and is the

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>195</sup> Abrams, *Spell of the Sensuous*, 9.

<sup>196</sup> Willerslev, *Soul Hunters*, 11.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid, 11

<sup>199</sup> Littlebird, *Hunting Sacred Everything Listens*, 29.

preferred diet of hunters who themselves rely on physical strength.”<sup>200</sup> I argue that hunting is one of the few practical and resurgent things that can mobilize a community and engender gender. Indigenous hunting is respecting animal life and leaving it to beyond human forces to decide the outcome of the hunt. Larry Littlebird states “My people were given hunting by the Creator as a way to remember. Hunters journey by faith.”<sup>201</sup> Littlebird also pokes at this more-than-human essence to hunting where he states “When we choose to slow down, stop, and listen then the seemingly distant oral past can be heard, and the new meaning for living today can be infused. However tenuous our present lives may appear; we can reconnect to a great order always present simply by learning to listen.”<sup>202</sup> He also adds that “The deer is a blessing; a gift to humankind, bestowed as a remembrance of our own life’s interconnected course; an interwoven thread connected to the beginning of all living time. The deer is food for the body and soul.”<sup>203</sup>

Another difference from sport hunting is the very notion of *killing*. Where Littlebird states “Killing a deer isn’t everything to hunting,” my uncles say. ‘fasting and praying, a man works hard giving his self to the Spirit the deer belongs to. We are only human; we cannot say what our giving should bring.’<sup>204</sup> I also believe that a lot of Indigenous hunters feel that we are connected to the animals as we both share this planet, Lauren Eichler and David Baumeister believe “the land and animals were neither owned nor ‘wild,’ but rather friends and kin who, when engaged with properly and respectfully, reciprocated the relationship.”<sup>205</sup> They also add, that sport hunters view animals as “wildlife resources and that claiming that nonhuman animals,

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>205</sup> Eichler and Baumeister, *Hunting for Justice*, 80

plants, and land are ‘resources’ implies that the primary relationship between humans and the world is one in which humans, existing apart from the world, dominate, extract, and consume the world for their benefit. This type of relationship runs counter to Indigenous notions of relationality and nonhuman agency.”<sup>206</sup> I also believe that religion also plays a role into this sport hunting ideology, whereby in the Christian creation story of the Garden of Eden, “Adam was Lord of the whole sublunary world, exercising dominion over all creatures”<sup>207</sup> Thus, giving rise to non-Indigenous hunters viewing animals as separate and capable of being dominated, and hunted without remorse.

I listen to other Indigenous hunters’ stories about how they were groomed to become the hunters that they are. What influenced them to be a hunter? What is being a hunter significant in Indigenous communities? Is hunting still relevant in modern times where we can go to a grocery store? What are the health implications of hunting? I use the very few Indigenous literature to hint at the significant of Indigenous hunting followed up by interviews with Indigenous hunters. I also explore Indigenous women hunters who are partaking in their community food security. Zoe Todd states “women’s involvement in hunting and fishing, together with the knowledge that women shape, mobilize, and share through these and related activities, is an integral part of the food security equation.”<sup>208</sup>

### **Rez Life**

I grew up on the Muscowpetung First Nation, near the hillside which is surrounded by coulees. Every morning I would wake up and look across and see the valley from our living room window. Most winter mornings, you would smell the burning of wood from the wood

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid, 80

<sup>207</sup> Harrison, *The Fall, The Passions, and Dominion Over Nature*, 2.

<sup>208</sup> Todd, *Living on the Land*, 196.

stove. I slept in the basement, so it was my job to ensure that we had firewood burning throughout the night. Most mornings, my father would awaken me at 7 am or even earlier to do daily chores including chopping wood, hauling bails, or sanding the hill (because if it was icy the school bus would not be able to pick me up, which I intentionally left unsanded on occasion).

When I was about 12 years of age, I was given my first gun, or what my father called a *rabbit gun*. Small enough to hunt small game such as rabbits and prairie chickens. I remember walking in the coulee on a brisk winter evening looking for tracks of rabbit. We would take several hours walking through the bush until we got to the top of the hill, most of the time we would come home empty handed. I remember we used to have this old pickup truck we named 'Doug' that I and my cousin would drive around the rez, hunting. One day we were driving around Doug, and we drove around a bush where a few white rabbits were, my cousin passed me his 16-gauge shotgun and I had hunted my first rabbit. As a 12-year-old boy looking for any kind of recognition that I was soon to become a man, I looked forward to taking these recently harvested rabbits to my grandfather's house just up the road. We pull up to his house on the rez, and I knock on his door. "Who is it!?", my late Dakota grandfather, Calvin Poitras answered the door. "Mushum! (grandfather), I hunted you some rabbits," he takes a step back looks at my boots, the rabbits, and then me. In a grumpy mood he yells at me "does it look like I am fucking starving!?" I was in shock! The door was slammed in my face. I thought you had wanted a grandson that would hunt or help you out with something to eat I thought to myself. I took the rabbits to the truck with my head down, my cousin was sitting in the driver's seat. "What happened?" Tyrell said. "Nothing, he's in a bad mood," "let's go see if Aunty Bev wants them" he says. We pull up to Aunty Bev's house, I knock on her door. "Come in!" I am carrying two rabbits in both hands, "Aunty, I brought you two rabbits," "Oh! Put them in the sink my boy I will clean them! Thank

you!” Later that evening she made rabbit soup. I said to my aunty “I tried to take them to mushum but he gave me shit,” “Oh he’s a grumpy old man” she said. We then drove down the hill, and I was confused on what the hell just happened. The thing about hunting, is we have many stories, of failure, and successful hunts, of funny stories and even scary stories. I aim to share my hunting stories, as well as the many stories of notable Indigenous hunters in my area. I seek to prove that there is quite the difference from sport hunting (even though some Indigenous hunters do engage with that) in comparison to Indigenous hunters. What I have come to understand is that every tribe does Indigenous hunting differently, and there is much to learn from them.

One of my favorite stories of hunting that I like to share is with my one of my adopted brothers Mahekan Awasis (Wolf Child) Ahenakew. In November of 2018, Mahekan came with me and a group of 6 boys to teach them about military survival in Wood Mountain, Saskatchewan. As he is currently active in the Canadian Forces training soldiers. I had wanted to create a winter survival course for our youth so that they would remember the training for the rest of their lives. It involved learning to survive in minus 50 weather, building fallen tree shelters, trapping, settings snares, hunting, and cleaning and respecting the animal. We brought with us Elder Bruce Cappel, and several other hunters and organizers. Not only was it a survival camp for the boys, it was a community hunt. We were going to provide for our community for the winter months. I documented the whole experience with a video camera and show the boys’ experience. We had done this to ensure that we were producing a new generation of young hunters to look after our community. I recorded our weekend and have made a YouTube video.

Not long after, I and my late older brother, Mike Keepness, and Mahekan were hunting on foot for elk in October near the Ahtakahkoop First Nation. Before we headed up there, we were

driving in the truck. Mahekan stated “There’s wild buffalo where we are going,” “wild buffalo?” I replied, “didn’t know such a thing existed anymore.” Apparently, there are wild woodland bison in northern Saskatchewan where we were hunting. We had parked the truck and walked up a slightly sloped hill, as we approached a corner bush, we see a cow elk poking her head out of the bush. It was about 3 o’clock this time, so we knew in a couple hours there would be more elk coming to eat in the field in the evening before dark. “Let’s go walk up this way for a bit and see if we can push them out” Mahekan said. It took us about an hour and a half to walk to the end of the bush where we were going. We then came to the end where we believe we seen a few deer that we spooked and started running. We checked their path and heard them move in the bush. “hmm, let’s head back now and check on those elk,” Mahekan said. So, we made our way back, which took us about an hour and a half. As we were turning the corner of the location where we first spotted the cow elk, I was walking closest to the bush; as we were walking, I heard a large snarl or grunt coming from the bush. “Did you hear that?” my brother looked at me in suspense. “Yeah, what was that?” I said. We all kept walking and looking down and you could tell everyone was trying to figure out what that was. As we come to the corner of the bush, I see Mahekan on bended knee looking at me serious— “The only way we are making out of this alive is if we climb up that tree,” and before I could put together the word “what?” – an alpha woodland bison comes from the bush, snarling and getting ready to charge as he was only about 8 feet away from us. I look at my brother Mike, and Mahekan, both of their faces were pale and fearful. I take a deep breath and pointed my hunting rifle toward the angry alpha bull. I thought to myself, “this is it.” Only a few times in my lifetime where I felt every neuron in my body go shooting with numbness, and they have not been pleasant moments. All three of us take steps backwards slowly and not making any movements to startle the alpha bull as he was pacing and

looking at us trying to figure out what we were. Prior to walking that way, we seen a few mounds of dirt where the bison were either scratching their large heads or bashing the ground with their heads. Suddenly, I could imagine myself being bashed by that bison's head. As we walked back slowly, I noticed Mahekan signaling for us to walk back a little bit faster. Soon after, we started to turn back and slightly jog. My pants and boots were soaking wet as it was rainy all day, but I didn't care, I was thankful to make it out of that situation. As we kept moving towards our truck, I realized that if that bison had charged at us, the only option would be to try outrunning it in an open field (which would have been disastrous) or try climb a tree. Or the two of us start shooting at it and hoping not to hit the person being the target for the bull. In that moment, I thought to myself, humans are *nothing* in the *wilderness*. In a moment of wilderness and a brief interaction with wildlife, I could have been taken and no one would have known, it would have been an act of nature. Quite humbling to say the least. As we started to move toward the truck, I looked back at the mound in which we walked up to the corner of that bush, the bison had moved forward to watch us on top of that mound. We all get to the truck, my brother lights up a smoke, and passes me and Mahekan one. I watched my brother smoke with a shaking hand, just thankful to be away from that charging bull. Mahekan had hunted a woodland bison before and it had taken him at least 16 shots with a high-powered rifle, because their hide is so thick. As we drove off, we started to talk about our ancestors and how that they would be on buffalo hunts and that some braves would not make the trip home because of how powerful and strong the bison are. They were brave to say the least. This story reminds me that, life and death, is just apart of nature. When we choose to become a hunter, you must accept full responsibility that you can be hunted too.

One of the central goals of this research is to Indigenous hunters and get their take on Indigenous hunting in their respective land base. Is it different than sport hunting? Is hunting even necessary in this day and age? Most of these interviews I had to interview them through emailing as this was during the COVID-19 pandemic. After restrictions had lifted, I got to interview Nehiyaw knowledge keeper and former Chief Barry Ahenakew about his understanding of oral history. I wanted to get the perspectives from young and old, male, female, two-spirit, with diverse geographical locations.

In this chapter, again, I interviewed Shana Pasapa from the White Bear First Nation, who is a Nakota woman hunter—this exchange was through email as it was during the COVID initial lockdown. Shana believes that Indigenous hunting is different because of *purpose*:

**Shana:** Purpose, Indigenous people appreciate and respect all animals as relatives. I was taught to pray and put down tobacco for the animal before I go out with the full intention to only harvest for food. This is like a contract with the Creator and animal, to let the spirit of the animal know that it will continue on as a helper to humans. As a hunter, I was taught to have pure thoughts, the prayers and thoughts throughout the hunt is like ceremony. Killing something is a violent act, but with our teachings we honor energy. When I'm hunting, I will think about how this animal will continue on through our veins, it will help feed many families. I envision where I want to see the animal, I envision a quick transition to the spirit world. I envision all the good things that will come from this animal. I will talk to the spirit. Doing this will make your hunt easier and more purposeful. This process alone, is more important to me than the act of killing the animal or how big the antlers are. Sport hunting does not work with the laws of the land.

**Shane:** *in what ways does your nation's hunting differ from others?*

**Shana:** I need to learn more about other ways nations hunt. One thing I notice is I was taught not to take pictures after my animal has been killed. Other hunters pose with their animal and post on social media. To me that supports sport hunting and not respecting if it was your brother. 'Would you take a pic of your brother after he is killed.' Said to me by my mother.

**Shane:** *how has being mentored by older hunters shaped your hunting experience?*

**Shana:** Growing up I would just tag along and watch, having that connection to the land and older hunters at a young age makes it easy for me to go back anytime. Being shown how to do things properly created a higher skill level and accuracy than if I was to start right now and not know what I'm doing.

**Shane:** *What is a good story that you had wanted to share about hunting?*

**Shana:** I was 12 years old, waiting in line at the store to pay for my snacks just before we were heading out to the bush. We planned to walk over 10 km that day. I was dressed in my hunting clothes. Some people were proud to see me, but there was one lady who told me "you're a girl, women aren't supposed to hunt." I was way too shy to respond, so I didn't and just shrugged my shoulders. My uncle heard what she said and he got mad and yelled at her. We sat in silence in the car, walked in silence, just saying a few words here and there. I knew he wasn't mad; he was just thinking. When we got to the place we normally walk to, there was a moose. It was a perfect day. We sat on the ribs of the moose together after preparing to bring it home. He lit his cigarette and told me to never let anyone tell me I can't, or I shouldn't be doing this. Look at you, you're out here doing it right now. You haul, hunt, and cut moose

better than any of those women. They might even come to you some day and ask for your help and you will help them. And at the time, I only knew my grandma used to hunt. I didn't know any other women hunters. To me this is a moment of empowerment, love, food security and food sovereignty.

**Shane:** *Why should we continue to keep hunting in this day and age? (because we can go to grocery stores, etc)*

**Shana:** Because today, we are reclaiming our identity. If you want to learn about life, you watch the animals. Our relationships with the land and animals is a huge part of who we are.

**Shane:** *What other land-based practices are utilized in your community that are significant?*

**Shana:** Using the four elements to cook and prepare our food. fire, water, land and air.

**Shane:** *How are you continuing the hunting traditions (and other land-based practices) in your nation?*

**Shana:** I participate in community hunts that provide for the elders in our community, take my children out to hunt, walking in the bush to heal my past traumas, watching the animals, praying and offering tobacco when I need to hunt, or just to acknowledge when one visits or crosses my path.

Interestingly enough, when I talk to local hunters, they too talk about taking a picture of your hunt, which has been a contentious subject. I understand where Shana is coming from and have taken down all the 'trophy pictures,' on my social media to respect the animal's life. Alternatively, I have heard that we should take pictures to promote it to young people that this

way of life is still ongoing, as young people are more attuned to social media than ever before. Indigenous women have a large role in community food security and offer a different kind of respect and love for the animal that needs to be highlighted. Their caring for the animals and respect is needed for male hunters. There is much to learn from women hunters in our community and how they view hunting, animal life, respect, and kinship. In an interview with Cree war veteran, Mahekan Ahenakew, he adds how Indigenous hunting is different than sport hunting.

**Mahekan:** It is not like sport hunting. The hunt for it is purposeful, we are trying to maintain a sense of continued identity through our culture, through our practices today. It's good to be generous and it's good to be kind and it's good to honor the hunt and it's good to respect your kill. Right from before you even know that you see it, like I said, you could pray, you could have a fast, you could do ceremony before a hunt, do whatever you want. Through the hunt we have respect for that and right to the end, even when you're finished eating that animal, everything about it, the nutrients that it gives you, think about it entirely. That's an entire life force, one life force that has given itself for the benefit of you, to provide for you, to give you strength, for you to be a better provider. And you will be best at this if you think this way. You will not be best in this life if you think capitalistic or if you start to think of ventures in regard to trying to make money of it or profit off it or renown or respect. A spirit has no reason to have any kind of respect in this life and when you come to terms with that as a hunter, you become a better hunter again. And it's not that you'll go out and you'll never be bored, because when you live this lifestyle it's like you can put your mind in this

zone when you get this connected and you can go out and nature will provide for you. You never feel stuck, you feel like regardless of where you are you'll be able to feed. This is something that isn't given, but it is taught.

I am starting to see a theme of Indigenous hunters praying and utilizing tobacco even before the hunt. As in Mahekan's explanation in how it is different is that some Indigenous hunters used to have a sweat lodge ceremony before a hunt to pray to that animal's spirit. This shows the utmost respect for the animal. What I was taught that if you put down tobacco and you pray to the animal's spirit before the hunt, it will decide whether it is going to show itself to you or not. In hunting, it is common to come home empty handed because you never seen an animal. What I was told is that if you are a person who lives by gratitude and prayer with your hunting lifestyle, the spirit will allow itself to be shown.

I had interviewed a hunter from the Kluane First Nation in the Yukon territory, which is very different bush than what we are used to in Saskatchewan; Isaiah Gilson is currently a student in Vancouver where he had to move from his home community for his education. We had done our interview through exchanging emails:

**Shane:** *how does Indigenous hunting differ from sport hunting?*

**Isaiah:** it depends on what your definition of what Indigenous means, because from nation to nation we have a lot of diversity. From my perspective Indigenous hunting is the relationship with the land and all that it comprises of. While sport hunting relies more on the ego of hunting, how big is the rack\horns? how big is the animal? etc. Not to say I don't enjoy the sport of getting a huge rack from bull moose, but my focus is the resources first. Sport and Indigenous hunting values intersect on some

points, but I believe sport hunting lacks connecting and acknowledging the resources of mother earth.

**Shane:** *In what ways does your nation's hunting differ from others?*

**Isaiah:** I wouldn't say the values of hunting communities differ that greatly. It depends on cultural diversity heritage of the nation, history of the area, geographical area etc. Yukon did not have any roads through the territory until the 1940s, so now a lot of the communities are still land based because of that. So then one way we differ from other nations is that it is a common lifestyle to hunt. I can't speak to the greater part of my nation as hunting values and styles vary but from my core community we hunt from solely from a place of respect and connectedness.

**Shane:** *How has being mentored by older hunters shaped your hunting experience?*

**Isaiah:** Being mentored by my hunting community has shaped me greatly. It plays a huge part in how we learn and pass down knowledge. When I got my first kill when I was 16, I had never really skinned and butchered it fully on my own, I did, however, watch my relatives do it growing up. When that moment came, I was bit nervous, but it came very naturally by just watching it be done most my life. Whether it be hunting or other things, mentoring is a huge part of how we pass down knowledge in our communities.

**Shane:** *What does being a 'hunter' signify for yourself, and your community?*

**Isaiah:** Being a hunter for me personally means a few different things, which comes to two main points, being a proper steward of the land, taking care of my family and community with the resources I acquire through hunting. Indigenous people had always been zero waste, more or less, ensuring to take care of the land and not

overuse the resources of the land. When I hunt share what I can of the kill and take care of those that don't have full access to get meat. Sadly, modern influence has affected our values, more people horde and are greedy, not as much sharing the wealth as there used to be.

**Shane:** *What other land-based practices are utilized in your community that are significant?*

**Isaiah:** Fishing has always been huge, within my nation we have one of the larger lakes, Kluane Lake, which in the past I heard was much more abundant then it is now, trapping with a few community members, guiding, my late uncle used to own horses but since his passing not much people use them anymore. Besides fishing, these activities have died down as it is not as feasible to run them full time.

**Shane:** *How are you continuing the hunting traditions (and other land-based practices) in your nation?*

**Isaiah:** Just by living the lifestyle and role modelling. Throughout these questions memories of my late uncle come up. He was one of my biggest teachers in my youth, one of the last Elders of his time, I come from bush people and because our history is still close to the land from the 1940s, we have it close. Much of the values and teachings have been lost or are not taught as much. In our ever-evolving society I hope to utilize technology more to teach future generations and have that balance between old and new. Mainly it is being a role model talking the talk and walking it. Along with creating the spaces to pass this knowledge along.

Throughout these interviews, I had wanted to collect the stories from hunters all over Turtle Island, to get a better understanding of how different Indigenous nations view hunting in

their traditional territories. I can see how Isaiah's community is more dependant on hunting and land-based resources more than my community. As he stated they did not have roads until the 1940s so their land-based lifestyle is still utilized.

In an email exchange with Jordyn Burnouf about hunting practices in Northern Saskatchewan, she mentions how it is different from her perspective. I will also note that Jordyn will also be aired in a Disney Plus episode about cooking and hunting (I found her first).

**Shane:** *How does Indigenous hunting differ from sport hunting?*

**Jordyn:** There is no sense or reason to take a life for a thrill. Indigenous hunting is livelihood, it is necessity, it is a deep-rooted connection to the land through nourishment and respectful harvest. It is teachings from generations before and learning for generations to come. To me, sport hunting lacks the respect and honour for the animal. Indigenous hunting is a bond between the hunter and the animal, the hunter and the land, and the hunter and herself.

**Shane:** *In what ways, does your nation's hunting/land-base practices differ from others?*

**Jordyn:** I have found that some hunters in our area have swayed from earning a kill to utilizing the unfair advantages of spotlighting, vehicles, and heavy baiting. This is not a proud thing to admit but I think the complacency in these methods come from the lack of teachings being passed down. It is a means of sustenance for families, yes, but it's a great example of the impact colonization has on these ways. Where I come from, I don't know many hunters who lay tobacco and honour the animal after the kill.

**Shane:** *Why should we continue to keep hunting in this day and age? And partaking in land-based practices (because we can go to grocery stores, etc)*

**Jordyn:** Like most Indigenous practices, hunting has teachings intertwined in every aspect. Mindfulness is a necessity, learning patience and simply, how to be silent, are some of the key skills I have gained from my experiences. You need to learn about the land, the elements, and the animals before, during, and after the hunt. The learning grows with every experience and your capacity to endure the force of these factors increases. These are things that you cannot find in a book, learn from a trip to the grocery store, or feel when you consume store-bought goods.

**Shane:** *How does hunting shape/land-based practices shape your life?*

**Jordyn:** The more time I spend in nature and attempting to hunt, the more I appreciate my ability to be able to practice these ways. I have found so much fulfillment in the simple things in life. When the food you consume comes from the land that you walk on, the water you cross, and the sky to pray to, it just provides a sense of nourishment that is unparalleled.

In similarity with Jordyn, I too appreciate being out in the wilderness and hunting your own food, there is much more appreciation when you cook it, and when you give it to your community; there is no better feeling than looking after your community and ensuring that your Elders are fed throughout the harsh winter months. Jordyn also touches on how sport hunting is influencing Indigenous hunters as they are partaking in spotlighting, or using unfair advantages to hunting. A lot of Indigenous hunters also do not put down tobacco and understands the respect one should have for the animal. I had wanted to highlight her mindfulness and understanding of Indigenous hunting in that it is different than sport hunting. I find that sport hunting is a shallow

form of hunting, sure they may hunt and take their meat to the butcher to be processed, but what is missing is the respect and the act of putting down tobacco (tobacco use will be explained more in a later chapter). Helen Ross adds Indigenous people “need to continue [hunting] . . . [it is an] important role in maintaining Indigenous culture.”<sup>209</sup>

### Âtaýôhkawew

The Nehiyaw word âtaýôhkawew refers to *he tells sacred stories or legends*, as does Barry Ahenakew, the former Chief of Ahtahkakoop First Nation and Nehiyaw Knowledge, he mentions why we put down tobacco, and ties Indigenous hunting to creation stories to understand its spiritual significance and why we still hunt today. In my experience, Barry is one of the most sought out after Elders in the Cree territories. A lot of Elders confirm their knowledge of stories and timelines with Barry. I am currently inviting Barry to come and speak to my university class on some of the creation stories, and some of the missing oral history of the Cree people. Keep in my mind in our conversation that I have been an oskapewis<sup>210</sup> in his prairie chicken dance lodge, horse dance lodge, and ghost dance lodge since I was 19 years old. He was also the conductor of the first sweat lodge that I had attended, so I and him have had a relationship of me being mentored by him, this included learning Nehiyew (Cree), learning Nehiyaw protocols and working hard for him (cutting trees and building lodges). Over time, he started to trust me because I kept sticking around and helping. He then would tell me stories over the process of

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<sup>209</sup> Ross, Helen, *Exploring Discourses in Environmental Decision Making: An Indigenous Hunting Case Study*, 372

<sup>210</sup> Helper in Cree, they listen to the Elders and do the physical work for lodges and help out in any way that is needed. You will spend years being an oskapewis as it is one of the ways of learning our traditions

fourteen years. In our interview, I allude to previous stories that he had told me where I will give more context.

**Barry:** Okay, all right. Well, when the Creator first made the Earth, and then he made the grass and the trees that began to grow. Then after a while he made the animals and the birds. Then he made them half spirit and half physical. He had ordered them not to mix with the others.

**Shane:** *That's when they could talk with each other back then?*<sup>211</sup>

**Barry:** Yeah, they stick to their own kind.<sup>212</sup> That was the orders he had given them. Stick to your own kind. Don't mingle. But because they were half spirit and half physical, the half spirit gave them the ability to be able to communicate with the other animals and the other birds. They began to find out that they could talk to each other. With that knowledge, they began to get in bigger, bigger, bigger groups. Then after that now when people were made, they began to exist of course, living off plants, and began to live off the smaller animals, and eat. By that time though already, the animals had been chastised by the Creator. (animals were given direction not to breed with other animals, and stick to their own kind, during this time they were cross breeding and creating abominations, which is a reason why the Creator created a mass extinction event)

**Barry:** They'd be chastised by the Creator and he rounded up all the animals and birds that he had made and he chastised them and told them that they were not

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<sup>211</sup> What I am referring to is times before major events happened on Earth like the great flood

<sup>212</sup> Don't mate or crossbreed with other animals or life forms

supposed to mingle with other kinds of animals, and other kinds of birds.<sup>213</sup> They were supposed to stick to their own kind. Yeah, so anyway now that he chastised these animals, he told them he was going to split them in half. Half of them were going to go up to where he lives. He was going to take them to where he lives. The physical part was going to run around on the Earth or fly around above the Earth for the birds.

**Barry:** So, when the people were made now, they began to live off the plants, the roots, and they began to have meals with the smaller animals. Then there was a fellow born, his name was called Chakapew<sup>214</sup> Yeah, Chakapew, Touches-With-A-Bow. He was born. He began to invent the bows and arrows and how they'd work better. So, he made the plain bow. He made the bow that was tied with sinew, and he made the bone bows out of bone ribs as he got bigger animals. But he also taught the rest of the people how to make these bows, and things became easier to hunt these bigger animals. And it's just natural for them to hunt bigger animals with the bow and arrows. So, the reason why is why they hunted to begin with. That was subsistence living. Feed the wife, feed the family, feed the kids, feed the grandkids. It was just natural to them. I guess as time went on, that disappeared for a while. After a long time later. Not after a little while, but a long time later when mankind got punished, when the Earth was flipped by the Creator, punishing mankind. We don't have to get into the reason why he punished them, but there was a reason. After that, there was an Earth and man and his wife, Ottawachas (oh-tah-wah-chass) that

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<sup>213</sup> Referring to a time period when animals were given instruction not to cross breed, however, they did

<sup>214</sup> A Cree person named touches with a bow who is itoyakan (legend) status

continued to exist, allowed by the creator to continue, begin life again. Later on, one of their descendants now... I guess those life forever a blessing from the Creator when he made woman for man over here earlier, and then Chakapew was born later on. Yeah, Touches-With-A-Bow. Now when they had been punished, they had already lost that.<sup>215</sup> They'd be cheated out of this life forever by a babysitter of Earth that the creator had chosen.<sup>216</sup>

**Shane:** *That's when he ate those white berries, and someone died?*<sup>217</sup>

**Barry:** Yeah, they ate the white berries with the little horns on them.

**Shane:** *I remember you told me that story.*

**Barry:** So now, they lost, there was *death* now. So those death. When people started dying now, they were taught the grease. So, the only place they'd make grease from was these animals.

**Barry:** Yeah, the fat.

**Shane:** *When you rub them on the trees, only spirits could see that?*<sup>218</sup>

**Barry:** Yeah, that's because the spirit world is considered Greaseland<sup>219</sup> in the south.

That's where the spirits go when the first one died, second one, third one, fourth one.

The fourth one was Chakapew.

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<sup>215</sup> When Creator made Earth, there was no such thing as death, however, the human race went against original instructions and the first human had died.

<sup>216</sup> The Creator left an entity in charge which went against the Creator and had been punished.

<sup>217</sup> The original instructions by the Creator to not eat these berries

<sup>218</sup> In our lodges, the center poles and structures of the lodge have grease on them so that the spirits can see them, as it helps them see our physical world

<sup>219</sup> The spirit world is interchangeable with this word, using grease on the lodge poles as a mechanisms to identify and come into the lodge

**Shane:** *Okay, he was the fourth person to die?*

**Barry:** He was the fourth one to die and he was the fourth one to be put to work by the Creator for the feast of the dead, or the ghosts that evolved from there.

**Barry:** Yeah, and then from there now, now it was death, but they still had half spirit and half physical. That's what got them into trouble over here, later on where the Creator said, "Well I can't have this happening." And he flipped the world, south pole became north pole. North pole became south pole. From there now, Earth and man are Eskiwe (Eski-wee), Ahtahwachas. They began life anew, but they had a hard time. Instead of being two things now, like what they were before the world was flipped, the creator changed mankind to three things. Now he included the mind, but he whittled down the spirit. The spirit was made a lot smaller and the mind was added with the body.

**Shane:** *Mâmitonêyihcikan?*<sup>220</sup>

**Barry:** Mâmitonêyihcikan, yeah. So then from there, they had to live with the dinosaurs. This is the days of the caveman now, the dinosaurs. So, this goes back 650 million years ago approximately.

**Barry:** Yeah, from there, Earth and man and the descendants now, they had a hard time. They had to live in caves and holes. They had to learn everything new, even the language. They had to learn how to hunt again. They had to learn how to dig again, teach their young, dig the roots and herbs, and smaller animals with stones and clubs. But later on, one of the descendants was born. His name was, after he smashed the rock onto other rocks and here it was obsidian, PeyPeyaKahkahnahsahnee. He cut

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<sup>220</sup> Cree for the mind or the brain

himself when he picked up pieces of it, it was so sharp. Then from there he began to have ability to invent. Naypwakaywin,<sup>221</sup> the ability to event. From there he thought, "This is sharp, I can cut." And he began to make knives. Then he began to make spear blades. Then he began to make smaller spear blades to fly faster and farther with an arrow, a bow. So, he began to fine tune the arrows again, and with the feathers at the end for them to fly straight. So Kinkahtoos Chipukayiyew again there, it was to help feed their families. Yeah, and he began to teach others how to make these bow and arrows. With PeyPeyaKahkahnahsahnee, that began again a renewal of this hunting.

**Shane:** *When did we start getting pâskisikanis?*<sup>222</sup>

**Barry:** Well that one there now could be unbelievable because here Kinkahtoos or Chipukayiyew, you could use either one. That means *sharp arrowhead*, but his descendants began to have more Naypwakaywin (ability to event) but it was a gift of the Creator. So, the descendants now began to have more genius in that, and they began to even have the power of stone, to be able to make a plane that could fly, and the power of stone for all kinds of things. They began to develop early weapons like Pahskizzikan (rifles) and stuff like that. Pahkseekun,<sup>223</sup> bombs with their airplanes. They began to abuse that power, now when they were abusing the power of this technology-

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<sup>221</sup> Cree for the ability to invent something and create

<sup>222</sup> Cree for rifle is pâskisikanis, pahskizzikanase is the motion of the metal hitting the bullet like a hammer

<sup>223</sup> Bombs used in the military from fighter pilots

**Shane:** *That was us (Indigenous people of North American) that was in charge?* <sup>224</sup>

**Barry:** That was us that got into trouble, because they started killing a lot of people with their technology.

**Shane:** *Okay, so kind of why we have it rough still, karma?*<sup>225</sup>

**Barry:** Yes, yes, yes. So that's why the great flood happened. The great flood. Now some people say the great flood took place 10,000 years ago or so, but old people used to say about 30,000 years ago.

**Shane:** *30,000?*

**Barry:** Yeah. Yeah, the great flood. So that's why all this technology was taken away and Wahseekeechuk<sup>226</sup> began to exist, because of his simple lifestyle and the raft that he had to make. He was blessed with that because he lived a simple life. He wasn't out to be a technology freak. So he was blessed with this raft, to make this raft and all these animals came onto his raft. He thought he couldn't do it, but the animals themselves did it, tried coming onto his raft. The creator ordered thunderbirds to make it rain, rain, rain, rain until he said stop. Then everything was to happen until he said stop.

**Barry:** So that flood, only the mountain tops, the highest mountains, only the tips were showing.

**Shane:** *Oh yeah, in Alberta?*

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<sup>224</sup> Referring to a time when the Indigenous of North American were technologically superior amongst other races according to Nehiyaw cosmology

<sup>225</sup> Referring to a lot of the crises' we have faced as a race

<sup>226</sup> The common legend or âta'yôhkansak known across Turtle Island

**Barry:** Yeah, yeah. Then the hunt of course. People had to hunt, the ones that were alive. Wahsahkeechuk had stored dried food, dried meat. They had perfected dried meat before, because of the sun. They prayed to the sun, so they perfected dried meat through the sun as a spiritual blessing in order to store their food. Pemmican evolved.

**Shane:** *So nowadays, say a young hunter gets his first kill, what's their protocol with that nowadays?*

**Barry:** Usually the people make a feast.

**Shane:** *I understand this a bit, but for those that don't know, why do they put down tobacco in their mouths and stuff after they kill?*

**Barry:** They put down tobacco because at the beginning when I talked about these animals, when the Creator took them up and made them half over here, half of the spirit when he took them up at the beginning. When the first man and woman began to have children, the creator ordered these animals now and he gave them the power to shift into a young man or a young girl, and he brought them down to Earth, and they were really animals and birds, but they were human because the Creator didn't want interbreeding. So, he mixed them with the people and the people began to have children with these spiritual beings that were half human and half bird. Well, they were all spirit, but they were all intents and purposes like humans. They began to have children with them. So those are our human beings as relatives, our relatives. Our ancestors are those birds and animals as well as the first people.

**Shane:** *Oh really?*

**Barry:** Yeah, that's why tobacco is put down to honor and respect that. Yeah.

**Shane:** *So, it's all kind of recycled, eh?*

**Barry:** Yeah, and then also names are given, they used Eagle Boy, Buffalo Child, because of these animals.

**Shane:** *It's like honoring them.*

**Barry:** Yeah, honoring them, and that's why tobacco is utilized.

**Shane:** *Okay, so it's kind of like your old relative then, eh?*

**Barry:** Yeah and tobacco is an inviter. You're inviting the spirit of that animal to bless himself for your children's benefit, the food. But they never over harvested. They took just what they needed, what did the family need, or what did the families need? That's all they'd take because of being related to these birds and animals.

**Shane:** *Me, I got a big bull two years ago.*

**Barry:** Yeah.

**Shane:** *Massive bull, and I felt really bad after I took its life. That's just kind of what I go through when I hunt. I feel like I don't feel good about myself, or who am I to take this beautiful being's life, you know? Kind of what I suffer with.*

**Barry:** Yeah, but that tobacco, that's what it is. Yeah, it's a compensation and it's also inviting the spirit that animal took. Have pity on your family, you know? That's what they're saying too is one day where it's going to be hard times, where we're going to have to get back to that again. . .

To conclude this chapter, as you can see in I and Barry's conversation, Indigenous hunting has its roots in Creation stories with âta'yôhkansak (legends, such as Wahseekechuk, and Chakapew). Which were the first individuals in Cree history to create the bow, or to re-arrange

technology to make the hunt more efficient. Barry has many stories that talk of Old Worlds, literally. The âtaýôhkansak in those times were the first ones to take up hunting, and they laid the foundation on why we still hunt to this day. It is important that we remember these individuals that have created this way of life for us. *This acknowledging of respect seen by Indigenous hunters is acknowledging our creation stories and our cycles of life and death with animals—* you will never have a sport hunter understanding that. I got a better understanding of why we put down tobacco when we take an animal's life through his stories. It is good to see that a lot of Indigenous hunters this day and age still put down tobacco to honor and respect that animals' life, as in Barry's stories, everything is recycled and by putting down tobacco we are acknowledging the eons of history between creation, animals, and humans. In female hunters' Shana Pasapa and Jordyn Burnouf's interviews, that both have offered different insights from a hunter's perspective. It was in Shana's interview that really made me consider why individuals take a picture of their animal. Shana has shared that we must also share this same respect for the animal with offering tobacco and saying a prayer and be mindful of taking a picture. Jordyn also adds to the conversation in how Indigenous hunting is different than sport hunting, where she states "Indigenous hunting is livelihood, it is necessity, it is a deep-rooted connection to the land through nourishment and respectful harvest. It is teachings from generations before and learning for generations to come. To me, sport hunting lacks the respect and honor for the animal. Indigenous hunting is a bond between the hunter and the animal, the hunter and the land, and the hunter and herself." Thus, in learning from these two female hunters, we are destabilizing hegemonic notions of who the hunter is. These female hunters need to be highlighted and are a meaningful part of our survival and Indigenous nationhood.

## Chapter 4: Responsibilities, Communities and Land

In this chapter, I will explore various land-based practices from all over Turtle Island, and how they are meaningfully contributing to their Indigenous nationhood and their respective communities. The goal of this chapter for is to provide a better understanding on how other Indigenous nations and communities are partaking in their land-base for empowerment and lifestyle. Are they benefitting from it? What are they achieving when they interact with their land-base? I believe that comparing what others are doing will also give my community project a better understanding on why land-based practices are relevant and why we should continue to do this.

Whether it is hunting, gardening, reclaiming bison, or medicine picking, land-based practices and pedagogies are being utilized to strengthen Indigenous nationhood by reconnecting to our homelands and improving health in a variety of ways. Everyone has a *responsibility* in their respective tribes and cultures. We will explore the various responsibilities that land-based practitioners are utilizing throughout Turtle Island. Kanaka Maoli scholar Noelani Goodyear-Ka'upoa states, "Kuleana (responsibility) should be more fully explored as a principle for building post-imperial futures that carve autonomous spaces outside of the capitalist, private property system by looking at traditional practices of providing food for the people," and that "the land is a chief, and the people are her servants. This kuleana is upon all people, whether we recognize it or not. If we fail to respect this authority, we will not survive as lahui Kanaka."<sup>227</sup> Jeff Corntassel and Cheryl Bryce add "responsibilities to the natural world originate from their long-standing relationships with

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<sup>227</sup> Ka'upoa-Trask, *Kuleana Lubui: Collective Responsibility for Hawaiian Nationhood in Activists' Praxis*, 155.

their homelands – relationships that have existed long before the development of the state system.”<sup>228</sup> I look at various ways that Indigenous land-based practitioners are taking the responsibility unto themselves to help their communities and to continue on their cultural performances and ways of life in modern circumstances.

Firstly, I would like to touch on a recent event that has happened in my home community, the Muscowpetung First Nation. In July of 2020, the Muscowpetung Chief and council have decided to purchase 15 Plains Bison to be sheltered on the reserve. The purpose of this was to ensure that in case of a lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic, that we would have enough sustenance to sustain our nation during the lockdown period. There was much talk about a *second wave*, which would happen potentially during flu season in the fall or winter, so the community thought it would take extra precaution in that event. It was a historical day for our nation—prior to the welcoming of the buffalo, we had a pipe ceremony and feast led by Neekaneet First Nation Elder Larry Oakes, who also mentors under Nehiyaw Elder Barry Ahenakew. We had shared stories and did speeches as a community on what the returning of the bison means to our people. A lot of the Elders and community were filled with pride that day in knowing that these animals that once looked after us and was our central dependency before the times of the Treaties, would also be looking after us again. I remember after the feast had taken place; I had shared a few words in my Saulteaux language and talked to my community about the importance of the return of the buffalo. We had drove up the hill to meet the buffalo at the gates, as a bison rancher was bringing them from Alberta. We had Larry Oakes at the gate ensuring that we had sweetgrass burning at the

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<sup>228</sup> Corntassel, *Jeff*, *Practicing Sustainable Self-Determination: Approaches to Cultural Restoration and Revitalization*, 92.

front gate so that the bison would be smudged as soon as they touched foot in our community. We had welcomed the bison with a few of our traditional singers welcoming them with an honor song. The gate opened, the singers were singing, and the bison started running and herding up to claim their new territory. I remember feeling the lump in my throat and recording on my iPhone as the event was taking place. It was an event that instilled pride and respect within myself and my community. In similar thought, Elder Jim Pratt stated “when they come out of that trailer (the buffalo), you could feel the strength and that power, the songs of our elders, who welcomed them here to our community. We grew up learning and listening to stories about this animal that our ancestors survived on. So that’s where it (discussion) took off from: to bring them back to our care here, because they once roamed our beautiful Qu’Appelle Valley.”<sup>229</sup>

He also added “they’re a part of this community moving forward, they’re here to give us strength as a community. So our community is safe, healthy and our community will start – which they have – to do good things for everyone, when [our people] drive down the road,



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<sup>229</sup> Pratt, Personal Communication

they get to say, ‘that’s our buffalo.’<sup>230</sup> Our Chief Melissa Tavita states that “it brought the buffalo back to our land on the spiritual side of it, seeing those buffalo come out of the trailer was a very emotional experience for a lot of people. In a way, they’re protecting our community and our people.”<sup>231</sup> Ultimately, the return of the bison has instilled community pride and unity which has been lacking in recent years. A lot of community members stop by routinely and put down tobacco at the bison ranch, and a lot of media has been wanting to get interviews on the return of the bison. We plan on having a lot of bison for years to come so we hired a full-time caretaker for the bison, ensuring they are fed with round bales for the cold winter months.

Another *responsibility* we had taken was to ensure that a fall hunt would fill our community freezer. I, and several of the rez<sup>232</sup> hunters, and youth had spent 5 days in Moose Mountain provincial park during the elk rutting season in late August.<sup>233</sup> Moose Mountain Park covers roughly 4,450 square kilometres filled with elk, moose, wolves, cougars, bears and all types of wildlife. There are records of people even getting lost out there for how big the park is. Plenty of other hunters from the surrounding areas also camped out in the park as the elk were calling. This was a good time for our hunting group to get together, hunt for a week, and provide for our community. All of the hunters said they were looking forward to hunting season as we get to stay out in the wilderness and do what we love. Several of the hunters had mentioned that it was nice to go out and be in the wilderness as everyone was cooped up from the COVID-19 pandemic. The first few nights we had driven around and

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<sup>230</sup> Pratt, Personal communication

<sup>231</sup> Tavita, Personal communication.

<sup>232</sup> We call our hunting group the rez hunters

<sup>233</sup> The season when Elk are calling to mate with one another and procreate

started hiking to try see where the bull elk were in the park. They started calling roughly three nights in as it was closer to the full moon, and it was starting to get colder. In the early morning, my younger cousin Koby Keepness had harvested his first elk. When we all had woke up in the morning, we went and helped him track down the elk and haul it out of the bush. During the hunt, pulling the trigger is the easy part of hunting, the real work begins when you must pack the elk out of the bush where no other human has made paths. Luckily, we had a good group of young strong men to do the majority of the labor as the more senior hunters were teaching the young men how to clean the animals properly and be more efficient when packing out the animals in the bush. When we first witnessed Koby getting his first bull elk, by tradition, he took a bite of the elk's heart. I actually have a video recording of it, so that we would have it on record. That being said, we will then have a feast shortly for him and the rest of the hunters to distribute the meat out to our community. I had asked Koby "how do you feel about your first elk bro?" he replied with "deadly, I feel like a hero" in a jokingly manner.<sup>234</sup> With the more senior hunters around, we had jokingly said "now he's a man, he's a Saulteaux warrior" and we had all started laughing. The thing about our group hunts is that we are laughing a lot of the time and making jokes of one another. I then turned to Dwight Toto another young hunter from Muscowpetung and asked him: "what were you taught Dwight when you get your first elk?"<sup>235</sup> Dwight said "he ate the heart." I asked him "how come they made you eat the heart?" and he replied "My mushum did it, my dad did it, so I did it, ever since then I have been knocking over big bulls."<sup>236</sup> I said, "do you put down tobacco too?" Dwight replied "oh yeah, you have too, that's the number one rule is if you kill

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<sup>234</sup> Koby Keepness on his first elk hunt

<sup>235</sup> Toto, Dwight, Personal communication.

<sup>236</sup> Toto, Dwight, personal communication

something you always have to lay down tobacco. Leave an offering, because that animal gave its life for you. To feed you and your family.” He had also mentioned about overkilling that some hunters partake in “you can’t overkill, you can hunt enough to feed your family but don’t kill the population off, make sure that there is enough there for next year. Who knows elk might be different in the next 20 years. My mushum has been hunting this park since he was 15 years old, that’s how long elk has been around here.<sup>237</sup> I grew up hunting here, since I was 10. That’s how I know this whole park, I grew up in it. Throughout the years I seen big Native hunting groups in the park, sometimes they’ll only walk away with only one bull, that’s it.”<sup>238</sup>

A few days later we had decided to split up into hunting groups of three, we figured if we left in the evening, we would cover lots of ground in the park and have more of a chance to get a bull elk. I, my cousin Bucky Cappo, and Justin Cappo were out on foot one evening, it was a beautiful walk on an old ATV trail. Instead of driving around and calling elk we thought we would go out on foot and go deep in the bush. As we walked for about 45 minutes, we came to two ponds of water on the left and one on the right. This was an area where the quad trail ended, and it quickly became dense bush. However, we did see elk trails and could tell that they would come and drink water from these ponds. We had told ourselves that we would stick around here and call in an hour as they will come out to eat for the night. We went into one of the large bushes on the right, as we were walking, we came across a meadow were there was about 6 elk beds, we knew that their tracks were fresh and could tell that they would rest here during the day to cool off from the heat. As we were making noise in the

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<sup>237</sup> Referring to Moose Mountain

<sup>238</sup> Toto, Dwight, personal communication

bush, we had startled a few of the elk and could hear trees and branches cracking as we surely spooked them off. I said there was no way that we would be able to track them in the dense bush because of how loud we were. We then decided to turn back to the place where the other two ponds were. By the time we got out of that bush, I already had a lot of cut marks from trees and branches. As we first came out of the bush, I had looked with my binoculars along the pond shoreline and sure enough I had spotted a cow elk. I said “look! there’s a cow, there must be a bull around.” I passed my binoculars around and everyone had a look. We had devised a game plan to walk towards them and hopefully call them in. As we started to move towards them, I had fallen over in the bush with my gun, and Bucky helped me up. I knew we were in for a long hike through dense bush. It took us about half hour to walk past one of the ponds and we had seen a few more cows on the other pond, we came to the shoreline and hid behind a nice shrub bush. I said to Bucky, start bugling<sup>239</sup> and he let out a few bugles that mimicked a young bull. This would, ultimately, infuriate the older bull and trick him into thinking that a young bull was in his territory to mate with his cows. Bucky had called a few times and the bull did not come out. The cows had receded inside the bush. We thought “damn! We missed our chance.” Just as we were going to head back, I said to Bucky “call one last time bro, but really mean it.” Then he let out an even louder call than previously. We sat in silence for about 25 seconds, then a large cracking from the bushes started! “Shane get ready” Bucky had told me because I was carrying a .300 Winchester magnum which is a heavy-duty gun for elk and moose. I was putting my binoculars in my bag and going to get ready to take the shot. As I bent down to put my binoculars in my bag, the bull had come out and it was up to Bucky and Justin to take the shot. Bucky in reaction aimed his .308 at the bull

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<sup>239</sup> Bugling is the process of using a whistle-like bugle to sound like either a bull elk or a cow elk

and took a shot at it, we seen the bull elk hit the ground. We all cheered and high-fived each other, I said to the boys’ “that was the easy part,” as there was only about 20 minutes of sunlight left with no cellular signal, and still a good hour and half hike out of the bush. We got up to the bull and he was dead, we had put down tobacco and all started to pray in our language, Bucky had to start cleaning the animal and we helped him. This took about 30



minutes and by this time it was dark out and we had to walk back in the dark and quarter<sup>240</sup> the bull up in the morning. I had told Bucky that I would leave my jacket over it overnight,<sup>241</sup> we then hiked back to our truck and we were having a difficulty walking through the bush, I do not know how much times I swore after I kicked a log and stubbed my toe. The whole walk back we were dropping swear words like it was common. Luckily, I brought two head lamps I gave one to Bucky in the front and one to Justin who was in the

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<sup>240</sup> Quartering refers cutting the animal up into ribs, hind quarters, and front quarters, you would usually take a hind quarter and walk it back to a truck, then keep making trips, a very strenuous process

<sup>241</sup> You usually put a jacket over the animal because it will smell like human and the coyotes and wolves won’t bother it, or try to eat it throughout the night

back, and then I used my iPhone for light in the middle to watch where I stepped. By this time, we were profusely sweating and had blood all over us. We had shone our light across the pond, and we saw nothing but glowing eyes on the hills. Bucky said, “Fuck those are wolves.” I thought to myself, “what a way to end a hunt, the hunters get hunted.” By this time, I was beyond exhausted, and my leg muscles were cramping up from high stepping in dense bush where no other human had touched before. I thought we still have an hour walk through this bush and if a pack of wolves decided to hunt us, I probably would have just let it happen how tired I was. We had kept walking and I intentionally changed the subject: “I think that is another bull because it did have greenish glowing eyes.” I said to take down the tension. But I thought to myself, what a way to go out. As we struggled for another half hour. We finally made it to the old ATV trails which felt like a breeze to walk. We were profusely sweating still, and we had hoped that someone at camp had made some soup as we were running out of energy. I started my recorder on my iPhone and interviewed Bucky as we were walking back on the ATV trail. The audio recording is us breathing heavily while trying to maintain a conversation:

**Shane:** *“how does it feel to get that bull for the rez, bro?”*

**Bucky:** “it’s an awesome feeling man!”

**Shane:** *it’s funny how every hunt is its own journey like that, even that ‘do one last call brother, one last call and really mean it’, and he came out, and you know the funny thing is I just reached down to grab my bag and then like my side start hurting and cramping so I couldn’t even take the shot, then you kind of stepped up and bang! I think we walked four miles, or beyond that.*

**Bucky:** “I didn’t have faith in my calling,”

**Shane:** *that was your first bull to call in?*

**Bucky:** “yup,”

**Shane:** *well everyone has a different call, right? And when it sounds different too, the bulls are like ‘who is that’?*

**Bucky:** “that fifth call was the one that brought him out.”<sup>242</sup>

**Bucky:** “this is the first time that I have ever had my foot cramp up behind my heel, man.”

During this time, Bucky is shouting in pain as his foot cramps up and we have to sit and wait for him so that he can walk again. He finally gathered himself and we walk back to my truck. We get back to camp and we were all walking funny and sit down beside the fire and all of us light up a cigarette. We then sat at the fire and told the story over again like I am telling you through writing. The other hunters that night did not get nothing, and they were far more experienced than us. We had laughed around the fire and we all joked that the inexperienced hunters came back with something—and that is the journey of the hunter; sometimes you come back empty handed, sometimes by chance and divine luck you come across a monster bull. We pray, put down tobacco, pray to the elk spirit to give us a *chance*, sometimes they respond, and sometimes they won’t. Every hunt is a journey and that is what I have come to realize throughout my years of hunting. This is what we sacrifice and in being a hunter we have accepted this *responsibility* for our tribe, to ensure that our community is fed. There were years where I had hunted several times and have not seen an animal, there were years where I was able to harvest two large animals and feed my family and community. We

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<sup>242</sup> Even elk have different calls amongst themselves, the trick is to sound somewhat different and pretend to be another bull elk in its territory

have been fortunate enough on this recent hunting trip that we got 3 bull elk, and 1 mule deer. We got the meat processed by the butcher and have it stored in our community freezer. We are actually planning another hunting trip very soon with the rez hunters in Wildcat Provincial Park which resides in Treaty 4 territory. This fall of 2023 will be no different, we are arranging a community hunt in the fall, and the rez hunters are excited to be in the wilderness again.

### **Young People with Old Teachings**

I had a good conversation with a youth from the Standing Buffalo Dakota Nation who is gifted with picking medicines for his age, which has been taught to him by his grandmothers. I had wanted to highlight how the surrounding communities have individual young people that were still very much carrying on old traditions of medicine picking and gathering. Dallon Yuzicappi is a young Dakota man who enjoys hunting, fishing, and picking medicines for his community and his family. I had wanted to highlight that in our communities, there are many young people that are carrying out their traditional responsibilities and teachings in modern contexts.

We have also touched on the significance of buffalo because his community Standing Buffalo has been keeping buffalo since the 90s', so I had wanted to get some feedback on what it means as Muscowpetung had recently pastured their buffalo a week prior.

**Shane K:** *How old were you when you hunted your first deer?*

**Dallon Y:** I was 13. My dad gave me a .22.

**Shane K:** *What do you guys do for, do you guys have..*

**Dallon Y:** Tradition?

**Shane K:** *Yeah, do you guys have a feast or anything?*

**Dallon Y:** No. When I hunted my first deer we just ate the liver.

**Shane K:** *Oh, really?*

**Dallon Y:** Raw. Yeah. That's rough but I mean, it's whatever.

**Shane K:** *What does that mean, like you're going to be a hunter for the rest of your life?*

**Dallon Y:** Yeah

**Shane K:** *And then where did you learn to pick medicines?*

**Dallon Y:** My grandma. All my grandmas, because I have like 13 grandpas and grandmas. That's where I learned it all, from...

**Shane K:** *To spot all the Teemsula?<sup>243</sup>*

**Dallon Y:** Yeah. Everything. I have that picker's eye. I'm the only one in my family who doesn't have glasses or doesn't need them. My grandma and all them always took me out and all that because I have a really good eye because I could see the sage. And that's the thing, sage needs lots of water to grow. And the same with chaga too, mint tea. You always got to pick it before it sprouts too, otherwise it has a bitter taste afterwards.

**Shane K:** *How long have you been picking medicines now?*

**Dallon Y:** Probably all my life. Because I've always been out there with my grandma and grandpa. And then when I lived in Saskatoon too. I lived there for probably about three years, then after that my grandma, I was crying, I wanted to go back home with her. She used to sew star blankets before she went blind. And then after that she just sent me out with a garbage bag, "Take this and we'll go for KFC," or something. And

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<sup>243</sup> Dakota for wild turnips

last year, when she was just a wealthy woman, like old ways wealthy, with all the sage and everything. She has her big living room full of sage and chaga, sweetgrass, everything was just drying and, we picked lots of that last year. And we always trade with my relatives from Wiikimikong<sup>244</sup> there. And then they always trade us for cedar for sage.

**Shane K:** *Cedar?*

**Dallon Y:** Yeah. Because we always use cedar too. There's creeping cedar here but it's not as good as the ones in Ontario and that.

**Shane K:** *Who all separates the Buffalo? On Standing Buffalo?*

**Dallon Y:** I don't know who takes after that job now. I think just my cousin Tristan does it, feeds them and everything.

**Shane K:** *What year did you guys get your buffalo?*

**Dallon Y:** '87 or '97? One of them. I was still a baby, but I still remember it.

**Shane K:** *How much herds of cattle? I mean how much heads do you have?*

**Dallon Y:** I think 175-200.

**Shane K:** *Nice.*

**Shane K:** *Wow. That was a huge day for us yesterday, man.*<sup>245</sup>

**Shane K:** *For our community pasture.*

**Shane K:** *Yeah. Yeah that community was really happy. Especially we did it right, too. Because we had our feast, then we had Larry Oaks come and do a pipe ceremony. And honored them the right way. And remember where that trailer was, when we backed them into the fence? You know when you go into a lodge and you smudge it, or*

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<sup>244</sup> A reserve in Ontario near the Manitoulin Islands

<sup>245</sup> When we got our buffalo

*you have the circle there?*

**Dallon Y:** Yeah.

**Shane K:** *Like with sweetgrass burning incense, they'll purify them when they go in and then they just came out and they were just running and that smudge out of it. It was wicked, man.*

**Dallon Y:** They know too.

**Shane K:** *I recorded it. Yeah, they were happy to be with Indigenous people again.*

**Dallon Y:** I'm going to go visit them and pray with them.

**Shane K:** *Do you think a lot of young people have mental health issues because they don't have connection with the land anymore?*

**Dallon Y:** Yeah.

**Shane K:** *When I was growing up as a kid, that's all we used to do is hunt, go cut wood for the house, never depressed, never had anxiety. Now kids, they're on their iPads and they get access to too much information in their heads, they see oh, Corona virus, there's going to be a war with China and they read that, eh.*

**Dallon Y:** Yeah. And then they get scared and everything. They're researching more and more. But that's not our way. When I was a kid too my mom, not buying you a game, not buying you a game. Because I got my first Xbox or PS3 when I was probably 15, 16.

**Shane K:** *yeah*

**Dallon Y:** Yeah. Like, "Oh grandma, look at that sage," we'll be driving. Or I'll see chaga<sup>246</sup> right away. The way it looks, it looks like poison ivy but then, it's all red on

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<sup>246</sup> A fungal medicine found on Birch trees that is used to treat various forms of Cancer

the bottom too just like sweetgrass.

**Shane K:** *That's pretty rare for your age. For young people to spot that out.*

**Dallon Y:** Yeah. Especially when I was young my grandmas always made me go picking, everything. That's kind of like-

**Shane K:** *And it never leaves you, eh? As you get older, you'll be out walking and you'll naturally just look*

**Dallon Y:** Look around for them. I was walking all over the rez and everything, I think I walked probably 15 kilometers and filled three baskets of sage that one day.

**Shane K:** *Holy. That's a lot, man.*

**Dallon Y:** In and out down that road.

**Shane K:** *What do you do with the sage?*

**Dallon Y:** I dry it out and my grandma keeps it. And she trades it for cedar or whoever needs it. And it'll last us throughout the wintertime and everything. So she was just real wealthy last year, she definitely picked lots.

In this conversation, it is promising to see that young people are engaged with cultural continuance. I have often been thinking about my one-year-old daughter and my nieces and nephews and how they are being raised. I am noticing that children currently are often on phones and tablets far much earlier than in my generation (I didn't have a cell phone until I was 17!). Now, it is common for a child to have a functioning cellphone on a network in grade 5. I ask: What are the long-term impacts of this? How can we get our children to engage with their land-base, in modern times when tablets and iPhones are commonplace? It is refreshing to see that Dallon, even though he is young, still had a childhood of being nurtured to pick medicines from his grandmother that he still practices today.

In our area, becoming a medicine person is a lifelong journey which starts when you are very young, and you can see that this is playing out in Dallon's life in picking medicines and preparing them. I know there are young people out there that are being mentored in this way and I wanted to show that there are a lot out there, and that is their *responsibility* to their families and communities. I thought it was important to highlight the various land-based practices out there other than hunting. I believe that medicine picking amongst young people is even less practiced than hunting. One day I am going to give Dallon Yuzicappi tobacco, to take me out to the bush to go pick medicines with him, even though he is younger than me, I still have much to learn from him. We plan on going ice fishing this winter, as he keeps inviting me out to harvest walleye and perch fish as he has been on the ice every other day this winter. Dallon also came out with me recently on a hunt, and I noticed that he has very good eyesight and can very well out in the wilderness.

### **Treaty Hunters**

Throughout the years that I have been hunting in Saskatchewan and all throughout treaty 4 territory, and I kept hearing the term *treaty hunters*. Even sport hunters call us treaty hunters. In Saskatchewan, if you are a status First Nation, you can hunt, fish, and trap all year round on lands that are not posted *do not hunt*. In Saskatchewan, you can hunt in provincial parks like Moose Mountain, or wildlife lands that anyone can hunt in these parks such as settler hunters if they are lucky to win a tag for a deer, moose, or elk. Apparently, settler hunters can enter their name in for a draw and get a once in a lifetime tag of an elk, moose, or deer. I had talked to one of my friends who is a settler hunter and he said that in this case, he wished he was a treaty hunter. We were raised in Saskatchewan and know that we have a treaty right and responsibility to hunt, fish, and trap in all seasons if need be. The reasoning

for this is because when the numbered treaties were signed with the Crown, they knew that we were dependant on it for sustenance and survival. To this day, a lot of Indigenous communities in Saskatchewan are still dependant on hunting, and fishing, and to a lesser extent trapping for their livelihood. I just wanted to emphasize that we have treaty rights and responsibilities to protect Indigenous communities and their hunters so that they can provide for their communities in any season. I touch on this more in-depth in the final chapter.

In a conversation with Navajo/Oglala Lakota Elder and knowledge keeper Vee Whitehorse from the Pine Ridge Indian reservation—he had mentioned that in the United States, Native Americans that hunt must abide by the rules of the state and can only hunt in the same season as sport hunters. Vee has spent a lot of time in Oklahoma and all over the United States including California, Colorado, Oregon, Washington, and South Dakota. He knows a lot of Indigenous knowledge and oral stories even from our area as he is married here and lives near my community on the Standing Buffalo Dakota nation. We invited Vee to our hunting camp in Moose Mountain to teach the kids how to set up tipi's and to learn oral stories from him. I enjoy chatting with Vee as I ask him a lot of Indigenous knowledge. I had asked him “Native Americans in the states, they can only hunt in season like mooniyas?”<sup>247</sup> he replied “yes.” I asked him “what happens if they hunt out of season?” Vee stated: “they get charges and fines.” I then asked him “so what's their season like only two weeks? Vee: “two weeks for specific tags for certain animals. [Your] treaties are strong up here.” Vee added “Natives used to hunt like how it is here in Canada. Treaties weren't being practiced or lands were being turned into parks.” I asked him who was responsible for this, “the state or the feds?” He said “both, some reservations have their own hunting laws set up within their

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<sup>247</sup> Mooniyas is referring to White people

reservation boundaries, but the states are always encroaching.”<sup>248</sup> I had wanted to emphasize treaty hunting because I feel that it is unique and the envy of a lot of sport hunters because we can hunt ‘out of season’ because a lot of communities’ livelihoods are dependent on it. The sport hunters complain on social media groups that there are ‘no animals left’ in their season because of treaty hunters overhunting—which is not the case. Most treaty hunters that I know continually hunt for their communities and ensure that there is sustenance for the winter months and continue to practice not over hunting. I believe that our responsibility as Indigenous hunters is to remind individuals of our numbered treaties. I believe that hunting is an act that is a product of our sovereignty and it is our duty to exercise that sovereignty to provide for our communities. Our ancestors that signed the numbered treaties wanted to ensure that our hunting, fishing, and trapping rights were solidified in the numbered treaties so the state cannot interfere with our livelihood.

In a conversation with war veteran and Nehiyaw hunter and young knowledge keeper Mahekan Ahenakew, he talks about the importance of Indigenous hunting and our responsibilities while being an *Indigenous hunter*, as we had just returned from an elk hunt near Parkerview, Saskatchewan that evening.

**Shane K:** *So how does it feel to get out and hunt again?*

**Mahekan A:** It's a really re-invigorating feeling, definitely makes me feel centered and grounded, for sure. It feels really good.

**Shane K:** *Yeah. That's awesome. So how old were you when you got your first harvest?*

**Mahekan A:** My first elk, my first big game kill, I consider my first harvest. I was 14

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<sup>248</sup> Whitehorse, Vee, communication.

years old.

**Shane K:** *Yeah.*

**Mahekan A:** I'd never seen that as a young guy and I was with my dad and uncle at the time and my uncle was saying 'hey, you're going to shoot today, you're going to shoot' and I was like 'Yeah, okay, I'm ready' kind of thing. I was obviously going along hunting for a long time, I'd say even as a little guy, maybe five, six years old... 'you're going to come out and help, you're going to come do something, hold a leg, do something'.

**Shane K:**

*That was awesome, eh? When you hunt with all those old guys when you were a young guy?*

**Mahekan A:**

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

**Shane K:**

*Me too. I always liked hunting with my dad and my uncles. Sometimes, my dad didn't hunt that much, but when he did, that was fun every time we went out. Couple times a year anyways, we'd go out. But then some of my uncles liked it a bit more and they were always out, I always went out with them.*

**Mahekan A:** Going out with the old guys, too, it wasn't just like how we go out hunting me and you are today. Back then, with their knowledge a lot more, when you rolled along or you walked along or you waited in a coolie or you waited before the sun come up or you were there with them after the sun went down, they tell you little tad bits about our culture and our ways. They'd sing songs when the sun would come

up, like a morning song or they'd sing a little song under their breath when the sun would be going down or they'd tell us, in regards to me being a young guy, the powers that the animal kingdom does have and stories that are passed down from generation to generation, examples of their abilities to trick men or to bewilder man or to be completely amiss in regards to hunting. This life is very real because we as First Nation's People, hunting was not a thing somebody just picked up as a hobby.

**Mahekan A:** Everybody in some way, shape, or form is a hunter, in all aspects of life, not only human. We as First Nation's People understood this most because we lived in a harsh environment, we didn't believe in ownership over anything, so this created this nomadic lifestyle that we so absolutely enjoyed and lived so freely from.

So being a hunter was, it was a teacher, that you lived with every day, minus the educational system that you would think you'd receive formally through a curriculum.

**Shane K:** *Yeah.*

**Mahekan A:** There was a curriculum I would say as well and this was taught generational levels, as a man reached certain steps in his life, and the same goes for a woman. As a hunter you would see in the wildlife that if you left nature alone long enough, it too has its own society. It too has its own way of living, way out there without us. You stay far enough away, you'll see it. You'll see the hierarchy of a herd of elk, you'll see the bulls where they all stand, who works for who. You'll see who the cows belong to, who's the heard bull, if you watch it all you'll see. You'll learn a little bit about another nation that is completely proud themselves and provides with us sustenance. So, the recognition of their nationhood as an animal entity, it puts into perspective where we are in the plane of existence. We are no bigger than the smallest

bug under a leaf and hunting shows you this right from the very get-go. When I was an early guy going out with the old guys to learn how to just stand in the cold and hold a flashlight after something died, after dark, or whatever it might've been, just to be there learning off of them was great. I'm fortunate to have been brought up by the hunters that have taught me everything that I know today.

**Shane K:** *We have lots of funny stories like that. I had a good conversation with Vee Whitehorse cause he's from the states, he came up with us to Moose Mountain, he's from South Dakota, and one morning we were having coffee and he was talking to us and he was telling us 'you guys don't know how lucky you have it will all your treaty rights here compared to if you're Native American'. Say if you hunted in Colorado. . . you're no different than a sport hunter with the seasons that you're allowed to hunt in.*

**Mahekan A:** We've become so far detached from what freedom actually is. We're grasping at memories and through our old ones and through hunting to kind of continue on that little bit of freedom as well. Another beautiful thing about hunting.

**Mahekan A:**

So it's hard to come across a bad hunter. I always thought that was a cool thing about the hunters I've come across. You can tell when you come across a hunter that's got the newest gear and has got all the toys, whistles, and gadgets, but when he gets out there and he doesn't know how to hold a gun, they don't know how to walk, they're not connected, but they try hard to this way and I appreciate the effort still. That's definitely the way you got to continue to move toward is getting connected and hunting is a big aspect in my life for that exact purpose.

**Shane K:**

*Yeah, reconnecting ultimately?*

**Mahekan A:**

I took all of my nephews out, one of my sister, all of her sons, I took them out and we got them all their first kills. This is a sacred thing that we've done since time and immemorial. Like those other hunters that you travel with they all have their own little rights and as do we, our own little rights of passage. I took them all out, this actually a week ago, my nephew went, and after getting two moose, went out on his own and got a nice buck deer for more meat. And this is meat that was much needed. And this was the first hunt that he's done without me being there to assist.

**Shane K:**

*That must've been a good feeling, eh?*

**Mahekan A:**

Beautiful feeling. As young as I am, I feel like I've taught somebody that will be able to provide for themselves and whatever family that they try to make, as young as that man is, down the road, regardless of he's my relative or not, knowing that the future is going to be that much freer like how I grew up, how my dad grew up, like how my grandfather grew up and his grandfathers.

To conclude this chapter, it is through conversations such as this where I learn the purpose of hunting and why we maintain Indigenous hunting to ensure that future generations are continuing this cultural performance and responsibility. I see a common respect with Indigenous hunters that I do not see in sport hunters, this respect becomes practical when tobacco is laid down and every part of the animal is used. As in Mahekan's story, sport hunters do not know when to quit and they do not put down tobacco. It is also our

responsibility to teach young hunters to respect the animals and the process of hunting. It can also be our responsibility to teach sport hunters how to respect the animals and not just hunt for horns, but for sustenance. As in Dallon's conversation, his responsibility is to look after his family in practical ways, its picking medicines, sweetgrass, chaga, mint, and all types of herbal teas that he picks. He is always on the lake, whether it is a warm summer day or ice fishing to feed his community. Already at a young age he has taken on this responsibility to be a land-based practitioner. There are a lot of young people in my area, and in my opinion, Dallon's love for the land and his skills speak to his wisdom for such as young age.

When discussing what it's like to hunt in the United States in comparison to 'treaty hunting' Vee Whitehorse mentions how powerful the numbered treaties are, in the context that we can always feed our families and communities all year round. Our chiefs that had signed treaties were thinking ahead, and in modern times, especially during a global pandemic, we can feed ourselves and our communities. Mahekan Ahenakew talks about the importance of taking his teachings as an Indigenous hunter and passing it down to his younger nephews and nieces in his community. This is also a part of my responsibility to ensure that our elders are fed, and that our youth are equipped with the skills to care for their families. I am fortunate that my dad taught me to be responsible and to look after my Elders, even when I was 14 and hunting deer, I made sure that they were the first to get fed, and then if there was any left over, I would take it back to feed my family. Thus, this is a part of our journey as an Indigenous hunter, we accept the challenges and sacrifices it has to offer but, in the end, that is our *responsibility*, to ourselves, to our community, and to the land. It is our responsibility as Indigenous hunters to exercise our treaty rights because they are acts of sovereignty. I argue that we also gave Canada sovereignty from the treaty making process as it is the only

document that we consented too. In the numbered treaties, hunting, fishing, and trapping rights are solidified and have become a part of sovereignty. As stated earlier in this chapter, not only did the community of Muscowpetung send out their 'rez hunter's' group they also purchased 15 bison. I believe that this resurgent act of allowing the bison to return to our community holds great significance for our culture and tribe. The buffalo have always been our central dependency in the Plains, and only recently have we adjusted to hunt elk, moose, and deer. It just goes to show our resilience as Indigenous people to continually adapt to change for our livelihoods.

The Rez hunters have shared in this chapter that they get a source of empowerment for being a provider in their community. It is a nice feeling when we return to our home community and get the meat butchered and then give it away. I sense that a lot of hunters are validated and get a sense of self-worth by taking on their responsibility in being a hunter. As discussed previously, a Fanon analysis allows colonized individuals to realize that they may be at mercy of a psychological complex based on inferiority. What Fanon misses or leaves out is how colonized people get their self-worth. I believe that acts such as taking on the responsibility to be a hunter can allow self-worth to be validated. Dene scholar Glen Coulthard who is familiar with the work of Fanon adds "the colonized must initiate a process of decolonization by recognizing themselves as free, dignified, and distinct contributors to humanity."<sup>249</sup> It is through self-worth that colonized individuals can transcend colonial complexes. As previously stated, I believe that masculinities is another 'arsenal of complexes' that is no longer in need of colonial recognition. But rather, validation and affirmation from their Indigenous communities for being a provider and someone who cares for their

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<sup>249</sup> Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 43

community. In this dissertation, I have shown that female and two-spirit hunters are actively taking on this responsibility to be a hunter for their community which destabilizes hegemonic notions of who the hunter is.

## Chapter 5: *Land Pedagogy*

Being Indigenous involves being interconnected to your land base, along with the cultures and traditions that are derived from this place of origin. Throughout time, and through trial and error, Indigenous peoples have learned to harvest foods, medicines, and livelihood, whether it's from the water or land. As time changes, so does the land, and as well as the people who occupy that time and space. Land pedagogy serves as *a teaching and learning tool for Indigenous people who utilize their land base*. Keith Basso states, "True people's sense of place, their self of their tribal past, and their vibrant sense of themselves are inseparably intertwined."<sup>250</sup> Basso also adds, "Apache people construe their land and render it intelligible."<sup>251</sup> Land pedagogy is a source of learning one's culture and traditions with the help of mentors. The land can teach us many things in our lives about previous land-based practices, such as those that our ancestors used to partake in. Basso believes "places possess a marked capacity for triggering acts of self-reflection, inspiring thoughts about who one presently is, or memories of who one used to be, or musings on who one might become."<sup>252</sup> When we recognize our land-base as a source of knowledge, reflection, and praxis, we can then utilize this to ultimately improve individual and community health. Leanne Betasamosake believes, "Our intelligence system is a series of interconnected and overlapping algorithms—stories, ceremonies, and the land itself are procedures for solving the problems of life."<sup>253</sup> Similarly, Zoe Todd states, "Much of the knowledge on which culture rests is acquired through the hands-on teaching and learning of skills that can be practiced

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<sup>250</sup> Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 35.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid*, 107

<sup>253</sup> Leanne Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 23

only on the land.”<sup>254</sup> Land and story go hand-in-hand. We learn about the land through story and we gain stories through our interactions with the land. Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie state, “Stories thus carry out labor; creating, maintain, and/or shifting narratives about the places in which we live and how they produce us and us them.”<sup>255</sup> Ritskes and Sium believe that “storytelling and land are both part of the sustaining and resurgence of Indigenous life and are not easily separable.”<sup>256</sup> By extension, “The land is a backdrop, space, or location; it is a sustainer, speaker, and archive for Indigenous stories.” Jo-Ann Archibald believes, “Because the oral process, unlike the written record, involves the listeners’ memories, it is limited by what the listeners can recall and later share with others.”<sup>257</sup> Robina Thomas adds “despite colonization, I believe storytelling continues to play very important roles in the lives of Indigenous people.”<sup>258</sup> By extension, “I argue that storytelling is essential to the survival of Indigenous people because stories pass on culture, tradition, historical facts, and life lessons.”<sup>259</sup>

Whether we are at a campfire and sharing stories of previous hunts, funny stories, and even dramatic stories of being out on the land—our *Indigenous collective memory* is moulded into stories that are passed down to younger generations of land-based practitioners, ensuring cultural continuity and transfer of our knowledge systems. It is like what Neal McLeod calls “collective memory [which] is the echo of old stories that links grandparents with their

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<sup>254</sup> Todd, Zoey, “This is Life,” 208.

<sup>255</sup> Tuck, Eve, and McKenzie, Marcia, *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology and Methods*, 34.

<sup>256</sup> Ritskes, Eric, and Sium, Aman, “Speaking Truth to Power: Indigenous Storytelling as an act of living resistance,” VI.

<sup>257</sup> Archibald, Joanne, *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*, 93.

<sup>258</sup> Thomas, *Research as Resistance*, 178.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid*, 178.

grandchildren. In the Cree tradition, collective narrative memory is what puts our singular lives into a larger context.”<sup>260</sup> The Indigenous hunt is carried through story and passed from one generation to another. I have interviewed several Indigenous hunters and land-based practitioners to get a sense of how their engagement with their respective land-bases allow them to unveil and re-learn things about themselves, their community, and their respective Indigenous nations.

Jordyn Burnouf reflects on her experiences with the land. Regarding how stories carry the essence of our lands:

**Jordyn:** I have been collecting stories over the years. Stories from my late kohkum, my moshom, family and friends from my community about the history of our area. I love hearing stories and sharing them to help people better understand the purity and simplicity of northerners way of life. I am the descendant of a medicine woman, hunters, trappers, fisherman, foragers, growers, and lovers of animals and scenery. I did not inherit money, but I did inherit a fortune in the form of lakes, trees, animals, and the beautiful teachings and stories that accompany that heritage. One thing that I have been able to do that I hold very dear to my spirit is helping Elders to take part in ceremony. I have taught kohkums how to smudge during women’s day celebrations in my community. I helped to plan one of the first powwow demonstrations in over 80 years and sat with a mushom who experienced powwow dancing for the first time in his life. I have been gifted with these experiences and I am forever indebted to Creator to continue sharing what I can with my own gifts. I plan to continue these traditions

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<sup>260</sup> McLeod, *Cree Narrative Memory*, 11.

through the work I am doing for the environment and clean energy. I would like to incorporate these teachings and practices into all the work moving forward for our communities' energy efficiency project. My goal is to connect young people with Elders to share stories, knowledge, and time together to better understand our relationship to the land and the direction we must move in to ensure its protection and the wellbeing of people, animals, and the land alike.

**Shane:** *What is a good story that you had wanted to share about being on the land?*

**Jordyn:** There was a beautiful moment that took place during a very peaceful day. My dad and I took the early shift and left the cabin at about 6am after my brother and cousin had been calling all night. The day before, we had spotted some tracks and broken trees so we knew there was a moose around. We were close. So, we got up, decided to hike to the hill back behind the cabin. Just before we departed, we remembered something in the boat, then decided no, it's too far, let's just get going, it's 6:00am, we're running late. So, we took off, hiked for hours. At some point in the early afternoon we came across a little stream, half frozen over. My dad signaled to stop and quiet. I thought, yes! Mooswa! But, it was just two little otters, they slid onto the ice and were just enjoying the day, playing. We sat for a few minutes and just took in the beauty and purity of the wild. I felt so grateful to be roaming the home of these animals and many others. This very much emphasized that the role of humans is not in owning and exploiting the land, but to honour and respect it. It is in these small moments that we can either acknowledge the epiphanies Mother Nature sends or we continue to

walk the path until our vision becomes a little clearer. Once we started moving again, we startled the little family of otters and they took to the water. Our hunt continued with no luck. We returned to the cabin where my brother and uncle informed us of the moose that was calling back the night before and the fresh tracks right by the boat they found when they woke up (presumptively from that morning, when we decided to not go grab our gear in the boat). Long story short, we crossed paths with our moose friend, it wasn't our time to find him. It was a humbling experience and now a funny joke. We just missed him!

As land-based practitioners, there are many stories that can be shared. As illustrated through the interview with Jordyn, she plans to continue collecting and sharing these stories of her engagements with her land-base as well as the stories from her grandmother. I also find it ironic as well while hunting, when you try your hardest to find an animal and then you put your guns away, and as soon as you are no longer prepared, the animal decides to show itself. This has happened to me more than once.

Isaiah Gilson shares his experience growing up 'in the bush,' which is comparatively very far north and remote from what most southerners are used to. He is going to film school so that he can capture this type of living through film. His community continues to be reliant on hunting for their survival. When I think of the far north, I think of Jordyn's community, yet, even further, Isaiah's community exists in the Yukon, where their hunting is far more different where they hunt caribou rather than elk, or deer.

**Shane:** *What is a good story that you had wanted to share about hunting?*

**Isaiah:** Two summers ago, I was in the Yukon, my sister and brother-in-law brought me to close to the Yukon-North West Territories border, his traditional

territory. He was intent on getting a moose for me, as I've lived in Vancouver for the past 4 years. 'That kid needs moose meat before he heads back!' he said.

Anyway, five solid days later of trying to get something, end of the day we go to the creek to wash up a bit for the night. We're all tired, trying to go back to camp to rest and my niece is being her sassy old self. We're telling her to "hurry up" "lets go" and she replied, "juss wait!" So, a little annoyed and tired, we look back to hurry her along. As we did, we seen a 2-4 year old bull, decent size rack. Few loud whispers and guns shots later we got a moose. My brother-in-law got a good shot at it, we waited a few minutes and found it laying down waiting to die.

Animals do that, hey, when injured they'll lay down and let their time come, so it's good not to chase them right away or else they get more scared and start to book it. If we did just hurry along and got my niece to come along without having to look back at her, we wouldn't have seen that moose and drove off. It's important that we listen to children, they know more than us in so many other aspects and not to hurry so much!

**Shane:** *How does hunting shape your life?*

**Isaiah:** Hunting is my life. It has been hard living in Vancouver being away from the bush that gives me so much medicine. Hunting has taught me a great deal of life teachings; I cannot be more grateful to have grown up and continue this lifestyle. It has taught me respect for all living things on mother earth; how to be a good host to those who show up to my camp, to serve tea or feed my elders when they show up, and much more. It [hunting] continues to teach me and feed my soul in so many ways.

**Shane:** *How are you continuing the hunting traditions (and other land-based practices) in your nation?*

**Isaiah:** Just by living the lifestyle and role modelling. Throughout these questions, memories of my late uncle come up. He was one of my biggest teachers in my youth, one of the last Elders of his time. I come from bush people and because our history is still close to the land from the 1940s, we have it close. Much of the values and teachings have been lost or are not taught as much. In our ever-evolving society, I hope to utilize technology more to teach future generations and to have that balance between old and new. Mainly it is being a role model, talking the talk and walking it... along with creating the spaces to pass this knowledge along.

As you can see, Isaiah is trying to show their lifestyle in the Yukon with modern technologies. He is currently in a film school in Vancouver and has hopes of creating documentaries for showing their way of life and highlighting Indigenous ways of being, another modern form of storytelling.

Daryl Lucero is an Isleta Pueblo artist and land-based practitioner from Isleta, New Mexico. His art reflects a lot of his worldview from his perspective which extends to the pueblo cosmology. He is currently engaged with a housing and land-based projects with his community in New Mexico. Daryl talks about how the land teaches us about ourselves in subtler ways, as he tends to his community garden and traditional housing projects:

**Shane:** *What did you learn from engaging with your land-base?*

**Daryl:** I think that's what happens when you're out on the land it is centered on your own personal observations. There's a personal awareness that takes

place where you engage with like acknowledging your presence on the land from that also acknowledging the types of relationships that exist out there that exist and being conscious of that. Personal awareness and interpersonal awareness and all of the life that exists. Breathing, that type of thing. Being present with the land, and conscious in that moment and space. Making connections with those spaces and land-based practices that we have in our communities. You are always in a state of learning and knowing, naturally and organically it unfolds.

This is where the links between land and the body come into play. The land-based practitioner is continually learning through both, the mind, and the body, about new things of themselves and their land-base. In my experience in hunting, we are out in the bush for several days. This includes sleeping in a tent in very cold climates, going to bed when its dark, and getting up at 4:30 am to go and hike 45 minutes to your location to call elk. When I go hunting, I learn something new every time, I learn about the cycles of the elk, I learn to see how I can better my cow calls, and ultimately, how I can be a better hunter. This past year, I actually started to run several weeks before I had gone out hunting so that my cardio and leg strength was prepared, as I had learned this lesson from previous hunts. In essence, every time that I go out and hunt, I am always learning from the land, whether its new medicines from other hunters, or how the elk are behaving. Interestingly, we noticed that at the end of August when I and a few hunters had gone out the elk were not calling back, which alludes to that the elk are not in their full rutting season, yet. We had figured that they would return into their rutting season as the temperature had gotten colder. I was also taught that the elk will also

start calling around the time of the harvest full moon. Sure enough, a week and a half later, the elk became in full rutting season.

Ultimately, the experiences of land-based pedagogy differ from individual to individual and is shared through story. Whether we are passing on these stories through a PhD thesis, film, or in-person, the land creates a method of learning at the individual level and contributes to the Indigenous collective memory where it is stored for future generations.

These stories that are passed down from elders and older hunters, are meant as a teaching tool for younger generations. The land has always been our pedagogy and stories have always been our biggest teachers.

### **The Language of the Wild**

In a conversation with Nehiyaw hunter and war veteran Mahekan Ahenakew, Mahekan talks about the importance of hunting and understanding how the land teaches us things that can be applied to life. I have spoken many times with Mahekan and have used his interviews a lot throughout this dissertation because I feel that he is a young person who was fortunately raised with the Cree language and cosmology. He understands old stories, and the importance of respecting animal life. He was raised in ceremonies since he could walk, and he speaks fluent Cree.

Mahekan and I often speak in Cree, but for the purposes of this interview we talk in English. I included him in another chapter and thought that his wisdom would also be suitable for this chapter as well. I have hunted with Mahekan for years, and he has taught me lots about hunting and preparation. In an earlier chapter, I talk about how Mahekan and I coordinated a wilderness survival and hunting course with some of the youth in my community. We had shown the youth how to treat the animal with respect when we take its

life, as well as how to properly clean and harvest it. In our conversation, I mention the art of *calling in* elk and refer to the language of the land. I have noticed that every time I hunt, I learn something new; about medicines, about myself, about the elk's behaviour, and about how other animals react. I refer to this language of the wild as that nature is in sync, animals have no need to speak to one another, they just exist within that ecosystem. When a human enters this wilderness, it takes a while for the human body to attune itself to the wild—in my experience, you can hear things more attentively, you listen more, your eyesight starts to recognize animal tracks, and so on and so forth. This is what I refer to as the *language of the wild*, where we essentially try to fit in this wilderness, and disconnect from the Western world. In an earlier chapter, I mentioned that it is commonplace in our Western society to normalize disconnection with the land. Every time I go out on the land, I learn something new. It is an ongoing pedagogy of learning and discovery, of myself and of my surroundings:

**Shane K:** *How do you think Indigenous people hunt different than sport hunters?*

**Mahekan A:** I think we have a closer connection to it, in regard to us being able to see a little bit better the cycle of life. When you're out [hunting] in the way that we were raised, the way that we were shown, you take into consideration all of nature, including yourself. You could prepare for this event as going out to find something that might give its life up for you...

**Shane K:** *Mm-hmm*

**Mahekan A:** ... to be honored to have an animal do that for you. For a person to have the initiative to go out and try to do something like that is a state of manliness, it was in our normal life cycle of things for ourselves. So, when you're hunting... not only are you witnessing nature, you're witnessing all forms of it and all stages of it... all

year round so you know how to respect it at all times. Right from when it's newborn to when it's old-aged. You're taught these things and with this type of education... it itself is more of a life experience, that you could not get from any kind of life experience that you go into college today and try to receive. This is just how we were raised. . . Aside from formal education, this style of education itself, teaches a person to be more cognizant, I guess you could say, in regard to where we all stand in it and on top of that. So, like I was telling you just a while back, I had my first opportunity to go out with non-First Nation's hunters and it was just something like going out for ducks and after I got the duck I was done. But they kept going.

**Shane K:** *How do you see that it's different?*

**Mahekan A:** The connectedness. After they shot that first animal... that was enough for me because I had already understood. I had done it a lot of times and regardless if it's an animal big or small, you understand death in this way. You understand in regard to everything has it's time. You got lucky. You didn't go out and hunt something, you got lucky. That animal showed itself to you. They have powers that we don't understand. So, when it kept going, it felt disconnected. It felt artificial. It felt as if I was playing a game. There was no real...

**Shane K:** *Like no consideration for the animal's life?*

**Mahekan A:** Yeah, like they didn't understand the sacredness of even just losing one life, as it was, and to respect it as so.

**Shane K:** *Yeah.*

**Mahekan A:** So, even for their ducks I put down tobacco.

**Shane K:** *\*laughs\* That's a good one man. So, I know for... well I know me and you*

*know this, but for say like a hunter... even white hunters could show respect too, eh? Like, what if they put down tobacco? That would change the game for them too, I would think.*

**Mahekan A:** Definitely. . . the lifestyle of hunting is an entire life built around the virtue of respect. The virtue of respect is one of the foremost of the hunting lifestyle, because you must have it. If you do not have it, you are not a good hunter. If you're not a good hunter, you're not a good provider. If you're not a good provider, and you're a male, in our culture where do you stand?

**Shane K:** *Yeah.*

**Mahekan A:** So, this makes a person credible... it makes a person relevant in our cultures these days and our own societies that are within Canada's society, I guess you would say.

**Shane K:** *Yeah, Tubba<sup>261</sup> is good at the bugle. He has those cow bugles and he'll create a situation for elk out there... like a young bull is coming into their territory, and then he'll send his boy down this way to do cow calls, and then get closer together so the other bull will think, 'Oh, this guy's stealing one of my cows!' and then he comes out. They're good at making this play with other elk. That's what I learned from hunting with these guys, they're good at calling. They create situations and he's thinking what an elk is thinking, essentially, right? 'Well, I want them to think I'm stealing a cow, I'm a young bull in his territory, and then he'll go in the bush and he'll just snap trees, make it sound like big horns are hitting trees in there.' You'll keep doing that...*

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<sup>261</sup> A more senior hunter in our rez hunting group

**Shane K:** *We hiked in the dark under the moonlight probably a good forty-five minutes out from our truck, right by the water there and that's when I kind of got it... how they create that kind of a situation and then all these other animals are listening to it too. I noticed that beavers... all of a sudden, this beaver was coming and he was slapping his tail, he was probably letting that bull know "They're over here!" Then we started walking back after, because we just left it, we'll come back in the morning and call. Then that beaver kept following us and he was slapping all the way. That's what I realized is that the wild has its own language and humans have to either adjust to it or you're not going to get anything.*

**Mahekan A:** Through it all there's positive growth. There's only so much profound learning that can be done. Through First Nation's hunting, this is the way I've learned to become the man I am today. With whatever I've done in my life it was through a hunter's mindset I've attained what I have in this life, and I'll only continue to live with that mindset. I don't wish for it to be un-animalistic. I wish for it to be as natural as possible.

**Shane K:** *Anything else you want to add?*

**Mahekan A:** Just a message to the future hunters and the current hunters that are out there to continue to respect whatever you encounter out there. Whatever way of life that you continue to follow, make sure that it has respect for the wilderness. Do not over hunt. All of what we have can be lost if we're not grateful. Always be grateful and do not over hunt. Don't mutilate your kill. Don't try and bring fame or renown to yourself for having the biggest bulls and having most of the biggest bulls, this means nothing.

As you can see with the performance of hunting, we can learn things about ourselves and apply them to our lives. Mahekan talks about hunting providing its own education. While hunting with non-Indigenous sport hunters, they did not have any sympathy and consideration for the animals and kept over-hunting.

I feel that every time that I do go out hunting, I learn more and more about the land and myself. I found that my mental health felt a lot better, after being cooped up for six months during this COVID-19 pandemic, it was camping and being out the wilderness for a week that reset my body and my mind. I was getting up with the sun and going to bed with the sun. Mind you, we had to be at our prime hunting locations at about 5 am every morning, as this is when the animals come out to come feed and drink water. You start to learn the behavioural patterns of the animals, and their tendencies, you must learn where the animals are by locating them through calling. In I and Mahekan's conversation, he likes to hunt through stealth, where hunters in our areas like to call the elk in with the bugle or cow calls. Every time I go hunt with other Indigenous hunters, I learn something new from them too, and every time I go and be out on the land for a series of days like a week or so, I learn so much more about the land; for example, just recently, I can finally pick mint tea by a marshy location, I had no idea what to look for, but Vee Whitehorse had shown me. I have been fortunate that I was able to hunt with Indigenous groups from far Northern Saskatchewan to Manitoba. There are a lot of similarities in Indigenous hunting groups and even some differences. What I noticed is that respect for the animal's life is consistent. This becomes practical when I see Indigenous hunters putting down tobacco for the animal's life. In Mahekan's story, he talks about that when they went out duck hunting with non-Indigenous hunters they did not know when to stop. He even put down tobacco for the non-Indigenous

hunters' ducks as they were not aware of the act of taking life. There is a common belief in Indigenous hunting groups that we take what we need and leave the rest. There is no need for overhunting, and we ensure that only bulls are hunted, and the cows are left alone to keep a strong animal population. That is another thing to consider that a lot of the Indigenous hunters that I know will not hunt a cow, or a young elk.

I find that it is essential for a lot of hunters to take a break from their busy lives with family, work, and other stresses and go hunting. It is one of the few opportunities that we can be in the wilderness. Where we hunt, there is literally no cellular service, so it is refreshing to be disconnected from the Western world and all its stresses. I wanted to reiterate how important this is because even an Indigenous NHL player alludes to the importance of returning to the bush.

Brady Keeper is a First Nations National Hockey League (NHL) hockey player who currently plays for the Vancouver Canucks; he is from the Cross Lake First Nation in Northern Manitoba. In our conversation, Keeper emphasized that he had to sacrifice a lot being an Indigenous NHL player, while missing the aspect of hunting and connecting to his land base:

**Shane K:** *So what were the things you had to sacrifice in order to achieve the successes that you have with hockey?*

**Brady K:** I guess one of the sacrifices was leaving home. That was the biggest thing. It was tough. Well, most of my AAA and Junior A I kind of stayed around home, but once... even like when I was 20 years old, that was... that was tough leaving to Maine. It was when I left the first time, and two days in I wanted to come home. I think that was the biggest sacrifice. And then at the time I had my little family as well

and leaving them behind, going to school. And then once the season started, they moved down with me in Maine and came and lived with me over there. But sacrificed a lot, obviously, being away from my grandparents, family back home, and friends... and even like hunting, because I hunted a lot and fishing. Fishing, ice fishing... doing that a few times. Hunting as well.

**Shane K:** *So you grew up hunting, you said, right?*

**Brady K:** Yeah.

**Shane K:** *So like for me... I always think that young people, they should get themselves involved with things like hockey or hunting. You've been, you know, getting out on the land. It helps their mental health. Why do you think it's important that young people should continue to hunt and do land-based stuff?*

**Brady K:** Well, it's part of our culture and it's important to keep that alive. We live off what we hunt out there and it's just, it frees your mind when you're out there and there's no phone, there's no cell service and all that kind of stuff. I guess it's like your happy place when you're out there. And that's how I felt and that's how I still feel about it. So, every chance I get, I get out there

**Shane K:** *Nice. So now that you are back home, are you hunting?*<sup>262</sup>

**Brady K:** I hunted a couple of times. They're still trying to get out and get shooting some ducks, but they had to lockdown back in Cross Lake. So, I haven't been able to go. I was in Nepals, Florida, practicing social distancing and all that stuff.

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<sup>262</sup> He is home for a few weeks before returning to Florida for training camp in a few weeks

Even a First Nations hockey player in the NHL understands the significance of hunting and being on the land while being Indigenous, it is an innate connection that never leaves you. I had wanted to incorporate his perspective because he is a good role model for the youth as he lives a sober lifestyle, who has worked hard at his skills in hockey, and it took him to be the first Indigenous player to play for the Florida Panthers and the Vancouver Canucks in the National Hockey League while giving back to his community the Cross Lake First Nation.

To conclude this chapter, from these interviews, I could see that there is a longing for individuals who leave their community to return to participate in hunting. For those experienced hunters like Mahekan, he emphasizes respect and puts down tobacco for the animal's life. I emphasize on tobacco in another chapter, however, just know that in many of the Indigenous cultures, tobacco is used to return balance once a life is taken. It is an inviter for that animal's spirit to be respected, while we carry on our lives. Jordyn and Isaiah grew up living lives that were dependant on their skills to ensure that a sustainable livelihood was maintained, whether it was by fishing or hunting, this ultimately served as a way for them to learn from land-pedagogy. Their remote communities are much more dependent on it, in comparison to mine.

Daryl Lucero shares that he is continually reflecting and learning in subtler ways with his traditional housing and land-based projects in Isleta, New Mexico. This also highlights how important story is in Indigenous communities. As story carries our culture, teachings, life lessons, and ultimately, our Indigenous collective memory. I remember hearing a lot of hunting stories of being out on the land; I remember hearing funny stories, and stories you could not make up. I share a few of them in the chapter Kiyosewin. For the purposes of this

chapter, I had wanted to highlight that Indigenous people from all over are using the *land as a source of educational pedagogy and cultural continuance*, and a place of healing and refuge—in most cases this means our survival and livelihood. And like pedagogy, it is meant to be passed on, it is meant to be lived and taught. The land has a language of its own, and we must understand this pedagogy by being present in it. Our human body attunes itself to the wilderness when we spend more and more time out there. In essence, it is a praxis of becoming wild and being present to your surroundings and we only come to these realizations by spending time on the land. Land invokes a conversation within yourself, where you are continually reflecting and learning.

Land also invokes community labour which a lot of the times brings in expectations of gender. As stated previously, labour should not be predicated on expectations of essentialist notions such as ‘roles’ and rather, focus on responsibilities. Engaging with land creates a pedagogy to be mindful of our conceived notions of expectations of gender. Land pedagogy reminds us that our Indigenous nations are more complex than gender binaries and is predicated on the notions of survival and being practical as Indigenous nations.

## **Chapter 6: The Life of a Hunter & Conclusion**

I believe that in understanding Indigenous hunting, we must understand why we hunt in the first place; for instance, as described in Barry Ahenakew's stories of *legends* in a previous chapter. We also must get a better understanding of why we continue to hunt currently, and also understand the recent historical impacts on Indigenous hunting that shape how we hunt in modern times. For the Plains people, we were very reliant on the buffalo for our survival and sustenance, however, after the enforced extinction of the buffalo by the state—what have we left? How did we survive, and continue to do so? In this chapter, I look at historical implications that affect Indigenous hunting, and even how the numbered treaties play a role into why we continue to hunt to this day—even sport hunters call us ‘treaty hunters.’ I conclude this final chapter with the main themes and realizations that have been mentioned about in previous chapters that were highlighted in the interviews. Also, I highlight that there are attempts for the return of the bison in different Indigenous communities and why this is important for our culture and community health. Let us look at a few historical impacts that affect how Indigenous people hunt today. Ultimately, we tie into how land-based practitioners are improving their community health in practical ways and maintaining and reviving their respective cultural practices.

### **Central Dependency and Treaty Foundations**

One thing we must consider is that Indigenous people have always hunted, it was necessary for our survival. However, our central dependency, the buffalo, was exterminated on purpose, so that Plains tribes would starve and be forced to sign the numbered treaties and become dependant on Government rations. I had wanted to emphasize that the extinction and return of the buffalo is essential to my nation and the surrounding nations. We no longer have

buffalo that roam freely in southern Saskatchewan (there is a small woodland bison population in the north), however, we have adapted to hunt elk, moose, and deer for our communities. I had wanted to make a few historical considerations of how important the buffalo was to our Plains nations. I examine how Indigenous Plains tribes have been affected by the extermination of the buffalo by the state. Not only did they try to take away our central dependency, but they also promoted us to be farmers which we also adapted to. My tribe has adjusted to the farming recommendation and have become one of the best farming communities in Southern Saskatchewan. It just testifies to the strength and resilience to Indigenous peoples and their capacity to change with the times. My tribe was dependant on buffalo and hunting for their survival, now, we mainly hunt elk and moose to feed our community.

I had wanted to touch on a few historical implications that have had long lasting effects. With encroaching European Settlers causing near extinction of the Indigenous continental population from disease along with the decline of the buffalo, these have led to some of the major factors that contributed to the pre-conditions of Treaty 4 and inhibited the livelihood of the Plains Indians. It is believed that during that time the “fur traders in contact with the Plains groups estimated that 50-60 per cent of the population perished.”<sup>263</sup> In addition to this, “it was estimated that a smallpox epidemic in 1869-70 proved fatal for about one-half of the Plains people.”<sup>264</sup> Keep in mind that treaty four was signed in 1874. In regards to the buffalo, it is believed that “as early as the 1850s, the Plains Cree reported that there were only a few buffalo ranging between the north and south branches of the Saskatchewan, and they

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<sup>263</sup> Carter, *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada to 1900*, 38.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid*, 38

were trying to protect the remnants of the herds from the Metis and other hunters.”<sup>265</sup> In addition to this, “the virtual extermination of the buffalo in Canada proceeded the final slaughter in the northwestern United States by a few years, as they were finally extinct there in 1883.”<sup>266</sup> It is argued that the buffalo population were in rapid decline because the United States wanted to force Native Americans on reservations, “recent studies have focused on the role of the U.S. Army, suggesting that the extermination of the buffalo was the result of a well-calculated policy to subdue Native Americans and drive them unto reserves.”<sup>267</sup> They also used other means of buffalo extermination “by employing and providing assistance to non-Aboriginal buffalo hunters, by routinely sponsoring and outfitting civilian hunting expeditions that slaughtered a massive scale, and by encouraging troops to kill large numbers of buffalo using artillery and cannon, the U.S. army according to some scholars systematically destroyed the buffalo.”<sup>268</sup> The resulting loss of the buffalo which was central to the Plains Indians diet inevitably led to starvation. It is believed that “the disappearance of the buffalo resulted in widespread suffering, destitution, and famine during the 1870s and the 1880s. While there had been temporary buffalo shortages in the past that were coped with, this was unlike devastation brought about by the final end of this resource.”<sup>269</sup> This caused “the Plains Cree and the Assiniboine [which] felt the earliest effects of the end of the buffalo and by the early 1870s there were reports of appalling conditions of poverty and starvation.”<sup>270</sup> Starvation influenced the pre-conditions so that the Treaties could be signed. According to

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid, 95

<sup>266</sup> Carter, *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada to 1900*, 95-96.

<sup>267</sup> Carter, *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada to 1900*, 95-96., 96.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid, 98

<sup>270</sup> Ibid, 98.

Talbot, “the traditional plains way of life underwent drastic changes during the second half of the 19th century. By the 1870s, the buffalo – the mainstay of their economy and way of life - had dwindled dangerously.”<sup>271</sup> Talbot notes how Morris<sup>272</sup> admired Indians to transfer from the buffalo sustenance to agriculture in order for survival, “he had often praised the various bands’ work ethic and their desire to farm in order to regain the self-sufficiency they had lost with the disappearance of the buffalo. The famine and pestilence provision was insurance against unforeseen disaster while the bands made the difficult transition to agriculture.”<sup>273</sup> Pretty much all facets of Plains Indian life were being negatively affected in some way: “other factors drove the Indian leadership to secure a relationship of mutual assistance, including the decline of the fur trade economy, smallpox epidemics, the illicit trade in alcohol by American free-traders, and the anticipated westward expansion of Euro-Canadian settlers and Metis.”<sup>274</sup> Therefore, “many chiefs and councilors were anxious to sign Treaties with the Crown to achieve stability and a new means for survival. The rumored sale of Rupert’s Land to Canada, conducted with little consultation or compensation, also alerted them to the need to act quickly if they hoped to secure protection and a fair deal and resolve a politically ambiguous situation.”<sup>275</sup> James Daschuk adds “by the 1870s, period bouts of hunger were all too frequent as dwindling bison populations were hunted for food and their hides for the industries of the urbanized east.”<sup>276</sup> Not only were the Chiefs under pressure to sign the Treaty, but Alexander Morris was as well: “the government was anxious to establish order

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<sup>271</sup> McCloud, *Cree Narrative Memory*, 62.

<sup>272</sup> Alexander Morris *the lieutenant Governor of Canada that signed the numbered treaties*.

<sup>273</sup> Talbot, *Alexander Morris his intellectual and political life and the numbered treaties*, 153.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid*, 62.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid*, 62.

<sup>276</sup> Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains*, 101

and a measure of authority over a vast region where the North West Mounted Police had not yet established themselves. Even so, Morris was under pressure from a cash-strapped federal government to negotiate modest terms, and he took pride in his ability to stay within the means of the government - although he and the government ultimately agreed to relatively costly terms.”<sup>277</sup> Alexander Morris also had pressure to ensure that “Canada sought through Treaties to acquire legal title to the land in order to complete the transcontinental railway (promised and held out as an enticement to British Columbia in 1871), which would in turn encourage immigration, establish a prosperous economy, and strengthen industry in Eastern Canada.”<sup>278</sup> Not only this, but “Canadian authorities were also concerned to stop American intrusion north of the forty-ninth parallel, as causes of potential serious international disputes escalated in the 1870s.”<sup>279</sup> It is a conspiracy that another factor for the pre-conditions of Treaty 4 was that Alexander Morris and the Hudson’s Bay Company had mutual intentions: “it is possible, though there is no documentary evidence on the point, that uncertainty about the identity of the people asking them to make treaty – were they representing the Queen or the company? – underlay First Nations concern about the obvious close ties between Morris and the HBC, symbolized by Morris’s lodging at the HBC post.”<sup>280</sup> In summation, Cree legal scholar Harold Johnson talks about the pre-conditions of Treaty and the compassion by the Chiefs to ensure Plains Indians survival despite the rough times:

“remember, at the time the buffalo were disappearing. Many of my family had recently died of diseases for which we had no medicine. I am not angry with you, kiciwamanawak<sup>281</sup>. I am not angry that the buffalo were slaughtered, or that the

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<sup>277</sup> Talbot, Robert, *Alexander Morris his intellectual and political life and the numbered treaties*, 64.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid*, 116.

<sup>279</sup> Tough, Frank, Arthur Ray, Miller, Jim, *Bounty and Benevolence*, 119.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid*, 116.

<sup>281</sup> Cree for cousins

Northwest Mounted Police chased the last herds into the United States to deny my family access to food. I am not angry that smallpox and influenza carried by Europeans killed so many of my family. Holding this anger is not easy, and I am helped by the memory that my ancestors at treaty were not angry. They did not point to the Queen's representative and say, 'you killed the buffalo, so now you must feed us,' Instead my ancestors showed compassion and adopted your family"<sup>282</sup>

Another example of this according to Sheldon Krasowski was that Chief Cowessess could not be at the negotiations because "Chief Cowessess contributed little to the Treaty Four negotiations and chose to follow the last remaining bison in the Cypress Hills rather than select a reserve near the Qu'Appelle River."<sup>283</sup> The Plains nations continually remind Canadians that we signed a treaty together, and that we should base our relationships by that. If the government wants to promote reconciliation, they should honor the treaties. The reason for understanding this historical information, is because it has and still does affect Indigenous hunting in the Plains. We have to understand that starvation was a calculated effort on behalf of the state. Because buffalo are no longer hunted, modern Indigenous hunting has had to focus on elk, moose, and deer.

### **The Treaty right to Hunt, Fish, and Trap**

One thing that I had wanted to emphasize was that our Chiefs that had signed treaties were thinking of our future. To this day, sport hunters, and even hunters from all over the World are envious of Indigenous people's treaty rights to hunt, fish, and trap, in any season. This is because our livelihood is dependent on it and those that signed treaties ensured that we had our methods to achieve a sustainable livelihood that were unbothered by settler law. We

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<sup>282</sup> Johnson, *Two Families: Treaties and Government*, 30.

<sup>283</sup> Krawowski, *No Surrender: The Land Remains Indigenous*, 141.

hunt for sustenance and to ensure that our nations will continue. We are thankful even in this global pandemic that we can send our group of ‘rez hunters’ to go get meat if it is needed by our community. I just recently secured funding for another hunting trip for the fall of 2022, where this will be our 4<sup>th</sup> year organizing, and mobilizing our community to continue to hunt for our people. I wanted to touch on the importance of treaties as it sets in stone why we can hunt and can feed our communities all year round and ‘out-of-season’ and give a historical context. Many Indigenous people all throughout the world do not have signed treaties where ‘hunting, fishing and trapping’ rights are solidified and therefore are an act of sovereignty. During the Treaty negotiations process, much was discussed and debated about what was meant in regard to the First Nations context, and the Crowns context, and ultimately, what these reconciliations and interpretations mean today. We will examine some of these interpretations of the treaty to get better insight on the differences between worldviews (in a previous chapter I referred to European thought ingrained in Descartes philosophy). Cree legal scholar Harold Johnson believes “the misunderstanding between us, *Kiciwamanawak*, is the difference between the written text of the treaty and our oral histories.”<sup>284</sup> In most of the Treaties, a peace-pipe ceremony was conducted to highlight the importance and seriousness of the negotiations; along with gifts and sharing, which highlighted attributes of reciprocity. Talbot believes “the discourse of reciprocity and equality, which often involved speaking in metaphor, were applied by both parties.”<sup>285</sup> However, if you read the dialogue of Morris, his rhetoric was persuasive. Morris knew that the Chiefs of Treaty 4 spoke in metaphor and in

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<sup>284</sup> Johnson, *Two Families: Treaties and Government*, 41

<sup>285</sup> Talbot, Robert, Alexander Morris his intellectual and political life and the numbered treaties, 17.

abstract notions giving evidence of their world views. For instance, Chief Cheekuk,<sup>286</sup> (The Worthy One) a leading participant in the Treaty 4 dialogue said “my ears are open to what you say. Just [k]now the Great Spirit is watching over us; it is good, He who has strength and power is overlooking our doings. I want very much to be good in what we are going to talk about, and our Chiefs will take you by the hand just now.”<sup>287</sup> Also, there was much discussion about the role of the Hudson’s Bay Company’s taking of unceded Saulteaux land, the Gambler<sup>288</sup> in an attempt to address this was questioned by Morris “[w]hat did the Company steal from you?” The Gambler replied “[t]he earth, trees, grass, stones, all that which I see with my eyes.”<sup>289</sup> Thereafter, Morris wittingly responded in an attempt to justify the theft, “[w]ho made the earth, the grass, the stone, and the wood? The Great Spirit. He made them for all his children to use, and it is not stealing to use the gift of the Great Spirit. The lands are the Queen’s under the Great Spirit.”<sup>290</sup> As you can see, Morris knew the Chiefs spoke in rhetoric and in metaphor, and he used this to his advantage to get the Chiefs to mark their “X’s.” However, it is believed according to Morris that “[W]hites and Indians were entering into agreements to coexist peacefully, as equals, under the sovereignty of the Queen, whose authority had been mandated by God.”<sup>291</sup> Morris was also aware of the traditional laws that the Indian Chiefs had in mind when negotiating Treaty; for instance, “Morris’s use of kinship language corresponds to traditional understandings of kinship among the First Nations.

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<sup>286</sup> My original Chief who was Chief before Muscowpetung

<sup>287</sup> Morris, Alexander, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North-West Territories including The Negotiations on which they were based*, 116.

<sup>288</sup> Another relative in Chief Cheekuk’s tribe

<sup>289</sup> Morris, Alexander, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North-West Territories including The Negotiations on which they were based*, 102.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid*, 102.

<sup>291</sup> Talbot, Robert, *Alexander Morris his intellectual and political life and the numbered treaties*, 67.

According to the Cree doctrine of *wahkohtowin*, an unwritten code of conduct, the symbolic relationship of mother and child is based on ‘the principle of mutual respect which entailed the reciprocal duties of nurturing, caring, loyalty and fidelity.’<sup>292</sup> Morris may have been potentially trying to understand the First Nations context of these laws and have tried to use them to his advantage. Despite the racism at the time, “Morris refuted the assumption of Social Darwinists that, as a people, the First Nations were ‘unconscious of their destiny’ and doomed to disappear. He believed instead that they were fully capable and willing to learn agriculture so as to survive and maintain their economic independence.”<sup>293</sup> In fact, the Chiefs were very conscious of the dialogue and had great vision for their people they represented, times were very difficult for the Plains Indians, yet, they have still managed to survive. The written element of the Treaty is just one part of the process. It is a written reminder of what was discussed but has no context of the First Nations interpretations. Treaty 4 was written and prepared well in advance by Alexander Morris, yet, the Chiefs, signed mere “X’s” that supposedly gave the Dominion of Canada the right to the land. However, there is much debate on the term *surrendering*. It is a re-occurring statement that ‘we never surrendered anything, we agreed to let Settler society coexist with us.’ Not only that, but I argue that the Chiefs presumably did not understand the document in its legal context, and if they would have known the Treaty had the terms *surrendering*, *cede*, *yield*, and what these translated into in the European context that it would have not had happened. I believe the Chiefs understood the verbal dialogue that allowed Settler society to co-exist in the Cree and Saulteaux territories, and did not give them the right to own. For instance, the document reads: “The Cree and

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<sup>292</sup> Talbot, Robert, *Alexander Morris his intellectual and political life and the numbered treaties*, 68.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid*, 170.

Saulteaux tribes of Indians, and all other the Indians inhabiting the district hereinafter described and defined, do hereby cede, release, surrender and yield up to the Government of the Dominion of Canada for Her Majesty the Queen and her successors forever, all their rights, titles and privileges whatsoever to the lands included within the following limits.”<sup>294</sup> I believe the Chiefs went by what was discussed in the dialogue with Alexander Morris, and while Morris did not once use the word surrender, but rather, used rhetorical notions of coexistence that was agreed by the Chiefs. For instance, Johnson states “the misunderstanding of my ancestors at treaty was linguistic and conceptual. We did not understand your language or your concepts of property. When Commissioner Alexander Morris explained the written terms of the treaty through an interpreter, my ancestors likely did not understand the underlying concepts that would be familiar to your family.”<sup>295</sup> By extension, “his journals and letters did not indicate that he explained the meaning your family associates with the words ‘cede, release, surrender and yield up . . . all rights, titles and privileges.’”<sup>296</sup>

The written elements of the Treaty also give rise to the reserve system that we know today; the document reads: “And Her Majesty the Queen hereby agrees, through the said Commissioners, to assign reserves for said Indians, such reserves to be selected by officers of Her Majesty’s Government of the Dominion of Canada appointed for that purpose, after conference with each band of the Indians, and to be of sufficient area to allow one square mile

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<sup>294</sup> Morris, Alexander, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North-West Territories including The Negotiations on which they were based*, 331.

<sup>295</sup> Johnson, Harold, *Two Families: Treaties and Government*, 41.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid*, 41.

for each family of five, or in that proportion for larger or smaller families.<sup>297</sup> In the Saulteaux language, reservations are called *iskonikonase* which translates to the leftovers.

The written treaties allow for hunting, fishing, and trapping<sup>298</sup>: “and further, Her Majesty agrees that her said Indians shall have right to pursue their avocations of hunting, trapping and fishing throughout the tract surrendered, subject to such regulations as may from time to time be made by the Government of the country acting under the authority of Her Majesty, and saving and excepting such tracts as may be required or taken or other right given by Her Majesty’s said Government.”<sup>299</sup>

Other written provisions included the transition for a tribe to farming with the help of the Crown,

“It is further agreed between Her Majesty and the said Indians that the following articles shall be supplied to any band thereof who are now actually cultivating the soil, or who shall hereafter settle on these reserves and commence to break up the land, that is to say - two hoes, one spade, one scythe, and one axe for every family so actually cultivating; and enough seed; wheat, barley, oats and potatoes to plant such lands as they have broken up; also one plough and two harrows for every ten families so cultivating as aforesaid; and also to each Chief, for the use of this band as aforesaid, one yoke of oxen, one bull, four cows, a chest of ordinary carpenter’s tools, five hand-saws, five augers, one cross-cut saw, one pit saw, the necessary files, and one grindstone; all the aforesaid articles to be given once for all, for the encouragement of the practice of agriculture among the Indians.”<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> Morris, Alexander, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North-West Territories including The Negotiations on which they were based*, 331

<sup>298</sup> Morris, A, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North-West Territories including The Negotiations on which they were based*, 331.

<sup>299</sup> Carter, Sarah, *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada to 1900*, 333.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid*, 333.

However, in few instances, the reserve was never given these farming provisions when requested. In fact, there is currently an ongoing legal case called ‘cows and plows’ which is being submitted by a lot of the prairie reservations because of Ottawa’s lack thereof of sending these provisions shortly after the numbered treaties were signed.

Other provisions provide for education on reserve, “Further, Her Majesty agrees to maintain a school in the reserve, allotted to each band, as soon as they settle on said reserve, and are prepared for a teacher.”<sup>301</sup> Though it is written that education is a treaty right, Morris also verbally discusses *the cunning of the White man*, some may interpret this to be another avenue of education as well.

As you can see, a lot of these treaty promises are not fulfilled in this day and age. However, since the signing of treaties, it has allowed Indigenous people to *hunt, fish, and trap to ensure our survival*. Even when we get pulled over by conservation officers, and they know we have a status card that they cannot do much because it is a legal battle they will lose every time. When they charge or fine Indigenous hunters, most court cases get thrown out over the treaty right to hunt, fish, and trap. I had wanted to give a historical context, on how we got the name *treaty hunters*, as we are even called that by sport hunters. I believe that hunting, fishing, and trapping is an exercise of our sovereignty that also give Canada sovereignty. By exercising these rights solidified through treaty, we are continually reminding the Canadian state of our sovereignty and our historical agreement.

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<sup>301</sup> Carter, Sarah, *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada to 1900*, 333.

## Learning to be Wild

In conclusion, I had wanted to take the reader through a better understanding of the life of an Indigenous hunter that is rooted in Indigenous culture and traditions. I have interacted with a lot of Indigenous hunters throughout the years, and for the very purpose of this dissertation, I have come to a few profound realizations. In my experiences, and in other Indigenous hunters' experiences, the land has a language of its own. For example, what I mean by this is that animals are in sync with our planet, they communicate with each other, when you are coming up to a bull elk near the water a beaver will let the others know that a human is around by slapping the water with its tail—it's a drama of nature. When you bugle and try sound like a young bull elk, all the other animals stop and listen. If you are good enough caller, you can call out a bull elk and have a successful hunt. However, if you make a mistake in your bugle, the animals will know you are a human, and the hunt will quickly be over. It can take years to master a bugle, or a cow call (which is why I never bugle when we go out hunting, I even been practicing for two years, and I still mess up). It has taken me years to be able to hunt elk, some hunters say that they are the hardest to hunt because they are so smart. It is that reason that they are nicknamed the ghosts of the plains, they are massive animals that most people will not even see in their lifetimes because they are well-hidden. They can smell you from hundreds of yards away and you must be cognizant of the direction of the wind, you cannot be too loud when you walk in the bush because you will scare them away. Thankfully, I have learned from older hunters who are great elk callers and can call a bull elk 30 yards away. Some hunters in our area call them and hunt them with a bow, which attests to their skills. I can only imagine how long it has taken them to learn how to call and hunt them with a bow.

I really enjoy the wilderness, while being in a hunting area where no other human has stepped foot before, you are walking and hunting in the area where you can be hunted as well. In many of my hunts, I have come across mother bears with their cubs, wolves, and have come across an alpha woodland bison in the rut that was willing to charge—as in the story I have told in a previous chapter. I have been charged at by bull moose, and even elk. These experiences humble you in profound ways. In being out in the wild, I have learned that your life is no more important than any other animal that is out there. We could have easily been trampled by a herd of bison and it would have all been a part of the dance of nature, I literally thought I was going to be seriously hurt or even met my death that day. Even as a grown man, I have always had fears of the wild, being out in the wilderness after getting a bull elk and having to hike in the darkness back to camp which is an hour away. *The darkness teaches you about yourself and your fears.* There are many cases of hunters and people going missing in national parks all over Turtle Island, whether it is bears, wolves, or just simply getting lost in the middle of nowhere.

Which leads me to another project that I had wanted to touch in the future which is a phenomenon in the wilderness that many Indigenous hunters call *bigfoot*, or by their Nehiyaw name *Mistapew* (big man) —many Indigenous hunters have come across them and have heard them in the wilderness. According to Nehiyaw Elder Barry Ahenakew, they are the spiritual policemen of the Creator and make noises and make themselves smell bad, so individuals become scared and get away from them and the area. Many sport hunters have also had interactions with them and when they come across them, this leaves them no longer wanting to hunt, or even go camping. *Mistapew* looks after other animals in the forest and can sometimes scare you if you are not respectful to the other animals (my personal theory is that

if you put down tobacco, they will not bother you). Though, throughout my interviews some hunters have touched on this subject, for the purposes of this dissertation I chose not to write too much about it as it may seem like a conspiracy or farfetched. However, they are very spiritual beings and I know Indigenous hunters that have personally seen them and have heard them from a distance. They make haunting screaming noises, whistle, whoop, and can take a whole tree and bang it against other trees to alert you that they are around and potentially let other mistapewak know. When we are hunting on foot in a group that it is a common joke that we use when we hear noises that are out of the ordinary to scare each other. Regardless, in the wilderness, we do not know what is truly out there, and it is truly humbling to take yourself out of your normal life routine and become *wild again*. I find in this process of becoming wild, we let the anxieties and stresses of the Western world slip away as the only thing that matters in the wilderness is survival, and your biggest priority is hunting, and planning your next meal.

### **Hard work pays off**

Another aspect of hunting that I have come to realize is that hunting goes hand-in-hand with labour which can sometimes fit into ‘roles’ and expectations of gender in our Indigenous societies. We are trying to break away from the traditionalist notions of a ‘man’s role should be this, and a woman should be doing that,’ and as you can see in the interviews, these binaries can marginalize individuals to try and subscribe to a gender. I thought Andre’s interview was good in that gender is a *spectrum*, and that Indigenous people can reside on any place in this spectrum and still have responsibilities that enhance their Indigenous nationhood and livelihood. When it comes to labour, everyone gets rewarded with food after a successful hunt. It is not just the person that pulls the trigger that gets the recognition, it is the individuals

that have contributed before, during, and after the hunt. We were fortunate that we had a lot of young men and women contribute to our hunts to help with cleaning the animals, the camp chefs, the ceremony people that were praying for us and giving us medicines to hunt.

Ultimately, our hunting parties hunted with *purpose and responsibility*. We had to feed our community by any means necessary. Our leadership has given us direction that we may have to go into lockdown which means that there would be no traffic in or out of our community while trying to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus. That being said, we filled our community freezer and have distributed the meat and have gotten several of our buffalo butchered. We know for sure that our community will be prepared for any lockdown situation, and if we need to send out hunters again that we have a group of hunters that are willing to go and provide for their community. When we got our elk butchered, I dropped off the elk meat to our Elders firstly, and made sure that they were fed. The Elders eyes would light up while saying thank you, and it was a nice feeling that the Elders in my community were being looked after. Being a hunter is being a leader in your community. You really see the reciprocity when you hunt and provide for your people. You are showing the community that you have the practical skills to look after your nation, and you are respected as such. Our hunting group is open to all hunters on the reservation that want to come and learn. We have a lot of youth that come on our hunting trips, and we teach them the best way we know how, and that was passed down to us from the older hunters. It is a good feeling having this cultural continuance, and I remember as I gave my dad elk meat he said to my partner, 'it's their turn now to look after us, after we showed them how.' It is a nice feeling in being a hunter and being rewarded with community respect. One hunter had shared with me that when you give out meat, and when families consume it, the hunter gets a special blessing as they are looking

after more than themselves. That reminds me that our Indigenous societies are selfless, and only because of colonization that we have started to think individually. Sport hunting has also made its way into Indigenous hunting where I see some of my friends that are Indigenous, only hunt for massive horns and take the picture of the bull. Only recently, have Indigenous hunters stopped and thought critically about taking a picture over their dead animals. For the purposes of this dissertation, I have only shown a few photos for the visuals of the story of the hunts that I have shared, but I have taken down my hunting pictures on my social media out of respect for the animals.

### **Indigenous hunting is not sport hunting**

It is common to see with the Indigenous hunters that I have interviewed that all of them put down tobacco when taking an animal's life. As Barry and Mahekan have stated, tobacco is the inviter, and it is a way to return balance in the cycle of life. Ultimately, it can be reiterated that before you go out hunting you pray to that animals' spirit to show itself, sometimes it will not and sometimes it will. Putting down tobacco is acknowledging the creation stories of the cycles of life and death with animals, and humans, which is we have the last names Strongeagle, Mesakeepinase (Keepness), etc. As stated in the subsection of Cree Hunters: Song, Dance, Dreams, and Faith, I have shown how Indigenous hunters were seen by the early fur traders as utilizing drums, songs, and rituals to aid their hunts. Daniel Laxer states "hunting was interwoven into the cultural fabrics of diverse Indigenous communities. To Algonquian speakers, many song and dance types referred to or described animals."<sup>302</sup> I recounted how drums were used and songs were sung to aid Indigenous hunters. Though, we are currently in the resurgence of bringing back these traditional aspects of hunting, we are

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<sup>302</sup> Laxer, *Listening to the Fur Trade*, 159.

still utilizing respect and tobacco. To my knowledge, sport hunting does not put down tobacco, have songs, and ceremonies for animal life. As stated previously, the European hunt was for the ‘thrill of the chase,’ and the rack of horns that sits in living rooms in what is known as a European mount. Greg Gillespie recounts early European hunters in Rupert’s Land in the era of 1840-70, where “big-game hunters and sportsmen based their understanding of sport on class, enjoying hunting for the sake of the sport,”<sup>303</sup> and “some hunted purely for sport, others for trophies to fill out their collections, and other desired specimens for personal or museum collections of natural history.”<sup>304</sup> Another part of Indigenous hunting that is important is that tobacco is put down because it is the acknowledgement of the Nehiyaw belief that the Cree are acknowledging old ancestors that is in a creation story of when the Creator took half of the animals on earth, by respecting the animal after the hunt, we are also respecting our relatives and our creation stories. The very first hunter to make a bow in Cree Cosmology was Chakapew as discussed in the interview with Barry Ahenakew. Understanding our oral history in why we still hunt in this day and age is important because hunting has always been a part of our traditions and culture. Remembering these old stories of Chakapew being the first hunter to make a bow is paying homage to our oral history and our collective memory.

We must realize that in hunting, everything in the wilderness hunts as well. Some hunters do not make it home after they have been attacked by bears and wolves, and that is all part of hunting. As Larry Littlebird states “My people were given hunting by the Creator as a way to remember. Hunters journey by faith.”<sup>305</sup> And ultimately, “living fully a hunter learns

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<sup>303</sup> Gillespie, *Hunting For Empire*, xxvi

<sup>304</sup> Gillespie, *Hunting for Empire*, xxvi

<sup>305</sup> Littlebird, Larry, *Hunting Sacred Everything Listens*, 17.

to accept and gracefully release his own dying.”<sup>306</sup> When I was out on foot and came across bears, wolves, and alpha bison, I could have easily been hunted, and that is all part of releasing your fears of our own death. It makes you mentally stronger on the topic of death that so many of us avoid. In hunting, I have come to accept my own death, and when it does happen it will be a part of nature. In stories growing up, I used to hear that when our ancestors used to go on bison hunts that a lot of young braves would not make the trip home because they were taken out by buffalo and trampled. Alas, when being a hunter, you choose to put yourself in the wild, and must accept what happens in the wild. I feel that this reconnection with the wilderness is what has helped me tremendously in my mental health and allows me to reflect on my own life. When I operate in the Western World, I develop bad habits, and bad behaviours, I know this is truly not me. When we are out hunting, it’s never comfortable, there is never enough food at the camp, and you are always tired because you must be up at 4 am, your body aches from the amount of hiking on foot, and if you are successful on your hunt, you will be even more sore from the packing of the animal! Imagine hauling out a 200-pound hind quarter on your back and having to walk knee high in the bush for 45 minutes—our ancestors were tough to say the least! But the smile on an Elders face and feeding your community and the kind words they share with you make it worth it. I also believe that this liberating feeling while out hunting is what Mahekan alluded to when he states it’s like you get to access, briefly, *the freedom of our ancestors*. Our daily lives are strenuous with family, work, bills, finances, and the list goes on; while out hunting, it gives you a break from that and it re-centers yourself to be in the wild. One thing that I look forward to focusing on in the future is to learn how to pick medicines while out in the bush. If you take a step in the bush,

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<sup>306</sup> Littlebird, Larry, *Hunting Sacred Everything Listens*, 41.

and look around do you recognize that plant? Those leaves on that tree? Which kind of tree is that? Everything created has a purpose—do we know what that purpose is? Because I sure do not know the names of 99 percent of those plants that exist in the woods. Yet, our Elders say most are all medicines. It is up to us to realize that there is a whole pedagogy and library of learning in the wilderness that they say takes a lifetime to learn. As Jeff Corntassel states “this is a spiritual crisis as much as it is a political, social, and an economic one.”<sup>307</sup> One way to become more spiritual in this sense, is to learn what is out in the wild, hunting is a pathway to that and the many other land-based practices. There are Indigenous communities that still hunt Indigenously, and I had wanted to highlight that throughout this dissertation. During the hunting interviews, I had interviewed these Indigenous hunters before, during, and after the hunts to get a sense of what the hunters go through. More notably, the interview with Bucky was when we were both fatigued from quartering up elk and we had the conversation out of breath on our way walking back to camp!

### **Hunting and story**

You sit a campfire, light up a smoke, your legs hurt and so does your shoulders; around you are 5 other hunters who have not showered in 5 days, and there is a bit left over soup by the fire—to me, this brings a smile to my face. Not only am I learning to be wild again while I am out scouting and hunting, but I am also learning a lot from those that tell stories around the fire. We drink coffee all day and light up cigarettes as if it’s our hunting fuel (mind you I do not even smoke much when I am at home). We will sit around the fire or in our tents and tell stories, most of the time we will be laughing as we are telling funny

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<sup>307</sup> Corntassel, *Reinvisioning resurgence*, 88.

hunting stories, or scary stories of Mistapew<sup>308</sup> or whatever other beings that are out there. There are a lot of stories to be shared. Some of the stories that are shared are stories of hunters that have passed on, some tell stories of other hunters who were great hunters and only used a bow. Now a days, I see a lot of Indigenous hunters picking up the bow again. A lot of older hunters attest and say that when you hunt with a bow that means you are a true Kiyohsē.<sup>309</sup> Imagine calling a bull elk in rutting season and he thinks you are another young bull in his territory and he is charging at you to fight, you only have one shot, and you better make it or either be really good at climbing trees fast! I remember looking at the younger hunters around the fire that were really enjoying themselves listening to the older hunters tell stories. They too will be groomed with these old stories and techniques from the older hunters and learn from our community's *collective memory*. As we continue hunting together, the more stories that we share and laugh about. Even recently, in our work and in our jobs, we pull each other aside and tease each other from the most recent experiences in hunting. We know that hunting is a good break from life, and it resets our bodies to get back into the natural cycles of the sun. My friend that is a part of our rez hunters' group had stated that he drank alcohol every day for 2 years, and when we went on our last trip in Moose Mountain, because of hunting and getting up early, he has been sober ever since. The land has reset his body and to this day he takes his wife and son out hunting and has not touched alcohol since. There is a real healing mechanism that the land has, maybe it's the fresh air, or giving thanks that we survived another cold night and there is something to eat—it humbles us in profound ways and reminds

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<sup>308</sup> Bigfoot

<sup>309</sup> Big game hunter in Saulteaux

us how lucky we are to be under shelter and enjoy the simple things in life. Maybe you appreciate things more when you get comfortable with the uncomfortable.

### **Destabilizing hegemonic masculinities – creating space for all**

By getting the feedback from hunters all over Turtle Island and to get a better understanding of our responsibilities in our communities, this allows us to engage in *complementarity* regarding community labor and especially in cultural performances such as hunting. Sneider adds “Complementarity does not enforce strict binaries but, rather, recognizes specifically delineated gender-based communal responsibilities; as long as individuals contribute to the community, their sex in relation to or classified by their gender is ultimately irrelevant.”<sup>310</sup> We must remember to be mindful and hold space for individuals that identify as queer when it comes to community labour because they have their own responsibilities that they feel called to do. As in Andre’s interview, gender is a spectrum and labor has nothing to do with gender. We must focus more so on responsibilities rather than essentialist notions of ‘roles.’ As in female hunters Jordyn Burnouf and Shana Pasapa’s interviews, they have shown that women can participate in the hunt as much as men do. We have much to learn from women hunters in how they respect animals and the land. This is like what Heidi Stark calls women’s participation which is often done in the “private sphere.”<sup>311</sup>

Our Indigenous cultures are much more complex than a binary, and in a previous chapter, I recalled some tribes have more than two genders. In previous times, I have heard an Saulteaux Elder say that when an individual was two-spirited they were held in high regard in the tribe because they had the ability to understand and feel as either a man or a woman.

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<sup>310</sup> Sneider, *Indigenous Men and Masculinities*, 64

<sup>311</sup> Stark, *Criminal Empire*, 1

Unfortunately, a lot of this thinking has been lost and is up to us in our communities to revitalize this respect for queer and two-spirit individuals in our community that contribute to community labor and honor their contributions. Andre Bear's interview, from a two-spirit hunters perspective gives insight into these marginalizing roles that are sometimes placed on two-spirit people in spaces such as ceremony. They show us that their labour goes beyond roles, and we have much to learn from their perspective of hunting and respect. We are trying to raise a generation of hunters that is mindful of expectations of gender. We have also created space for girls to attend our camps, they were chaperoned by women in the community, where they also had their own camping area. The girls were involved with cleaning the animals, helping to set up tipi's and went on medicine walks. They were also involved with the tanning of the hides that were collected as part of our community hunts. We want to encourage more two-spirit and female youth to join our hunting group and ensure that the proper chaperones are available. This work will be ongoing as we continually host our hunting camps.

### **Hunting Camps and Youth**

When we began our hunting group in 2018, with the help of Warrant Officer Mahekan Ahenakew, we did not think that we would be continuing this every year. The first year was almost like a designed survival school for the youth to participate in. As we progressed, we brought Elders and senior hunters along to have activities for the youth to participate in. These included picking medicines, setting up tipis, and learning teachings from Elders inside the tipi. We did not let the youth handle firearms but when a senior hunter came back with a bull elk, we taught the youth how to put tobacco down, respect the animal, and properly clean it. The youth got knives and gloves and learned how to properly take the hide off the animals.

We have also had culture camps where the hides from these hunts were furtherly cleaned by the youth which later become moccasins. The hides also go to the grade school on Muscowpetung where they are furtherly tanned on tanning racks as part of their land-based education. We have opened the hunting camps for both male and female youth, but as the years went on, we have had more male youth that wanted to attend. We try to teach our youth to be respectful of each other and to be respectful to the animals that we hunt. Some of the boys are now 20 and older and have started to hunt with the senior hunters. In the Rez hunters' group, Koby Keepness got his first bull elk at the camp in 2021 and we shared the importance in our culture of what it means once we get our first big game. I had informed him that we have a feast ceremony because he is letting all of creation know that he is accepting the responsibility to becoming a hunter. As a result, he hunts and is successful every year, and he is naturally progressing from an Antawēncikēwin<sup>312</sup> to a Kiyohsē<sup>313</sup> which is part of our hunting group. Meaning from hunting small game to becoming a big game hunter, a transition that occurs when you accept the responsibility of being a hunter.

### **Community Health and Hunting**

One of the main reasons that we go hunting is to feed our families and our community. A lot of people who received the harvested meat enjoy it because its meat without all the processing as seen in grocery stores. Usually, when we get our elk or moose, we take it to a butcher to get made into sausages, hamburger, roasts, steaks, and jerky. When the meat is ready, everyone in the community is ready to receive it. One thing to consider is that it is the teenagers and children that have a tough time adjusting to wild meat as they are conditioned

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<sup>312</sup> Small game hunter in Saulteaux ie) prairie chicken, rabbits

<sup>313</sup> Big game hunter in Saulteaux

to eat processed foods. They have a difficult time getting passed the fact that it is an elk, deer, or moose. However, when you are raised in a family that consumes harvested meat it becomes a normal thing. Reiterating what an Elder had said in a previous chapter, Beverly Poitras states “I’d rather eat it, it doesn’t have all the fats a cow has, and the meat is not tough like a cow.”<sup>314</sup> I have been hunting and giving Beverly wild meat since I was a teenager, I remember giving her my first rabbit I hunted when I was 12. She taught me to clean the animal and make rabbit soup! She recently passed away, and I will really miss spending time with her, hunting for her, and learning about the old times. Her stories and memory will forever live on in our community’s collective memory. My aunty Beverly was the first person that I had hunted for since I was 12. She taught me how to clean and prepare small game like rabbits and prairie chickens and prepared to eat wild meat rather than processed meat.

As discussed in a previous chapter, we have a diabetes rate of 12% which can be mitigated by community action and ensuring that we are providing our community with adequate foods—a practical and simple task that can be done in the community. It will take years to see the results of our endeavours, however, we are ensuring that we are training new hunters and ensuring the younger generation is groomed with young people that are used to wild meat. In talks with the Muscowpetung leadership, they have agreed that I can do research in the community if I am able to provide the health statistics and demographics of the community throughout the years. This work will be ongoing as we will be hunting and mobilizing our community every year, as we have in the past three years.

There is now a lot of young hunters coming up in our community, and they have been hunting on our rez a lot lately. We have elk, moose, and deer on my reserve as well, but when

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<sup>314</sup> Beverley Poitras, Personal communication

we go on our community hunts, we go elsewhere where the animals are more abundant. I just recently secured funding for our 2023 fall hunt, and the community is eager to go in the next few months. We are planning a hunting trip this fall and winter where we will take our rez hunting group and many other youth. We plan on having activities for the youth during the day and when the hunters bring back an elk, we will teach them the importance of tobacco and how to properly clean an animal. We are also considering sending one of our hunters to a butchering school so that we can do the butchering ourselves to save money.

As discussed previously, the Muscowpetung First Nation took it upon themselves to purchase 15 buffalo. This was done to ensure that we had good quality meat for our community members in case of a lockdown. The community is planning on keeping this herd of buffalo and growing our local bison population. The return of the bison to our community has had a profound impact on our community as a lot of community members had shared how proud they were. A lot of people from Regina and the surrounding area come and take photos of the bison and put tobacco near the fence line. This is also our responsibility as being caretakers of our land-base to restore it to its previous state that was accessed by our ancestors.

### **Research Findings**

As previously stated, the overarching question that will be guiding the research: *in what ways can land-based praxis, and pedagogy enhance and positively impact community well-being, health, and cultural continuity?* And secondly, *how can land-based practices destabilize colonial-imposed 'roles' and expectations of gender?* I believe that to answer the first question, we have to understand the importance of reconnection to land and gaining access to our lands. Our rez hunters are able to go out and hunt for several days and bring

back elk, moose and deer. The hunter that goes out and hunts is rewarded with the self-worth from the pursuits of achieving their responsibility. This self-worth is validated by the community through ceremonies, and gratitude. This also shows up when we go door to door and drop off the meat at Elder or families in need's homes. This also provides our community with *choice when* it comes to food. We have a community freezer where we deliver and allow for band members to pick up their food. In the Saulteaux philosophy, we strive for *mino bimadiziwin*, or a good life, which is a life with choice. Essentially, we are seeing hunters providing for their community as essential in validating their self-worth and providing their community with healthy food choices which further mitigates diet-related chronic health issues. This will lead to the reduction of our 12% type II diabetes rate, which will be generational change over a period of years.

As for how can land-based practices destabilize colonial-imposed 'roles'? There is evidence in the female hunters Shana Pasapa and Jordyn Burnouf's interviews that women's responsibilities in hunting are done in the private sphere, where they are sometimes not seen in the public. They have stated that it is not about an expectation of what one should be doing, but rather what one can provide. I believe that our female and two-spirit hunters should be highlighted to show that they are dismantling who the hunter is and are actively involved with our Indigenous hunting practices. Our Indigenous nations were always predicated on survival and ensuring that a sustainable livelihood was possible. It did not matter who achieved this, as long as it was completed. In the interview with two-spirit hunter Andre Bear, he has stated that he often has felt marginalized in these spaces because of expectations of gender. He also affirmed that it is important to utilize your responsibility rather than a role, that was also predicated on survival. Andre Bear states regarding female hunters: "It's not about gender

roles. It's really not about that. It's about survival and the same sense that she needed to know how to hunt and survive.”<sup>315</sup>

### **After the Hunt**

I am fortunate that this dissertation has been a lifelong journey, little did I know that it has been writing itself since I was 12 years old in learning and accepting the responsibility of being a Kiyose. I think that I am an inexperienced hunter compared to the hunters that I go out with. I still have years to learn. However, I am thankful that I started learning that art of calling elk, it has taught me a lot and I practice a lot in my garage. I am always thinking about the next hunt and enjoy my community hunts. I feel that even if I go a few times a year during the hunting season, I feel whole and fulfilled throughout the year. I can continue with my work, and family life, knowing that I have the skills to return to the bush and provide for my community and family if need be.

Community hunts are good time for social bonding, and community love. I am continually reminded that as Indigenous people, our mental health is dependent on our social interactions with our community members and relatives. As I am 33 years old, I am appreciating the Elders in my community, and I always invoke them to tell me stories of how the reservation used to be, how they used to hunt, where they used to go—I am realizing that there is an urgency to collect these stories as many people in my home community are passing away. For instance, as in one of my stories, my older brother Michael has passed away, my aunty Beverly, my mother, my sister, and many other Elders in my community. I am reminded how important our knowledge systems are and that we should always record our stories, whether it is through a dissertation, audio recordings, or by film. Another side project

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<sup>315</sup> Bear, personal communication

that I have been involved in is doing oral history mapping with the Elders of my community. I had sat them down one by one and had them talk about their life story on camera. They had shared the shifts and changes of our reservation, what life was like in the 1940s, when electricity and European technologies came on the reservation. I enjoy collecting these stories and feel that it is meaningful to our community when we record them and store them for the younger generations. We just recently lost an Elder who was fluent in Saulteaux, and we are down to about 3-4 people in our community that can speak the language. Doing this research in my home community has taught me the importance of relationships and community bonding. It also reminds me of the importance of returning to your community and helping out with the skills that you have. I continually write for my community for grants and other projects. We are currently in negotiating a land claim for 17,600 acres that was illegal taken in 1909. I am thankful to my chief and council in that they have asked me to be a part of the negotiating process. I also have been storing and archiving the historical documents that I have been provided with in our oral mapping sessions. I am indebted to my community for always taking care of me through my post-secondary schooling and hiring me and letting me work with leadership and community. I have moved away from home since I was 17 to pursue post-secondary education, I feel that my life is coming around full circle and I am returning home to work with my community as we prepare to transition off the Indian Act, and look at ways to get our traditional lands back and venture into sustainable economic development.

My next goal in hunting is to become a bow hunter, so that I get good at calling and hunt with a bow instead of a rifle, that is a whole other level of hunting that I know nothing about. There is a word in Cree called *Tustawiyosak*, which means that *they decided to pick up the bow*, according to Barry Ahenakew “and remain with the old ways of living. That was

Kawacatoose, Little Blackbear, Saddle Lake, Frog Lake, and Kehiwin<sup>316</sup>. Ahtustawik – putting the feathers on the end of an arrow. Wiyosak is the shaft of the arrow.” Those were the tribes that decided to stick with the bow instead of using rifles and other European technology. They made the *choice* to live by the old ways. Tustawiyosak was a choice by the old chiefs – they made the choice to utilize the bow over European technologies and wanted to live by the old ways.

In conclusion, there are efforts all over Turtle Island for Indigenous people to reconnect to their land base and improve their health and communities in profound ways. The only way we are going to mitigate diabetes is through community action, education, mobilization, and action. We have had our rez hunting group for several years now and have been feeding our community from our harvested meats to our garden vegetables. Other communities have inquired about our hunting group and how we got it started and how we got it funded to incorporate our youth and have the mentorship element involved through a Jordan’s Principle proposal I had written. We always include our community Elders to come and share with the youth that attend. I have tried to highlight the many narratives and land-based experiences all over Turtle Island, including young and old, male and female, and two-spirited. I had wanted to share their voices and their stories so that we can be more accommodating to their struggles. Indigenous collective memory is held and shared through story, and it has always been our nations pedagogy and method of learning. Indigenous hunting is one pathway to continuing our culture. As in Frantz Fanon’s analysis of seeking ‘self-worth’ to transcend colonial inscribed complexes of the psyche, you can find self-worth and empowerment in being a provider for your community and reconnecting with your land.

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<sup>316</sup> These are all First Nations that exist in Saskatchewan and Alberta

*This is a reminder that the land is awaiting our return, as it serves as a praxis of pedagogy, responsibility, stories, healing, health, and our survivance and continuance of Indigenous nationhood.*

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