

Gwalxyee'ens: Love and Refusal as Felt Research with Gitxsan Youth

by

Gina Lynn Mowatt

B.A., Vancouver Island University, 2015

M.A., University of Victoria, 2019

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

Doctor of Philosophy

In the School of Child and Youth Care

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University of Victoria

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Abstract

Suffering caused by historical and ongoing settler colonial violence in Indigenous bodies, communities, Nations and territories cannot be addressed by neoliberal western narratives of healing or wellness. Drawing on felt Indigenous feminist and queer theory, this dissertation engages the question: how we can do ethical and liberatory research with Indigenous youth relating to wellness and self-representation? This research centres an arts- and community-based project on Gitxsan homelands, in Northern British Columbia, conducted in partnership with Kinship Rising, a SSHRC funded community-engaged research project focused on Indigenous youth reclamation and wellbeing. The central themes of this research, which inform and are informed by workshops with Gitxsan youth and community members, are community reclamations of power, agency, groundedness, joy, resistance, refusal and love, based on an anti-colonial and liberatory framework. This project engaged 100 Gitxsan elementary school children in applied workshops and arts-based activities to support the creation of a large outdoor mural to honour the Gitxsan Nation's pride, connection and resurgence at the elementary school. Calling for Indigenous felt arts-informed processes in research, this dissertation brings into question reductive, neoliberal approaches to Indigenous youth wellness by analysing dominant discourses of individualized and depoliticised healing; and instead centers Indigenous youth resistance, joy and continuity in the face of colonial violence.

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Mom and Dad, for creating sanctuary, in home and our family, for being my foundation of love and joy. It is an honour to be your daughter.

Morgan, this work is our love song,
 Sibling love is daring and expansive, challenging and hilarious,
 There will never be a bond more honest or steadfast than ours.

My sibling’s children,
 Creation sent you,
 You are the answer to all the “whys”,
 When my world stops in darkness, you are the will that makes it move,
 Wii’ oy ‘niism.

Dedication

For Jack, Janie, Sim maa’y and Sa.

List of Terms/Sm'Algyax words

1. Ayook: Law
2. Adaawk: Family/Wilp histories
3. Gali aks Gitxsan: On the rivers Gitxsan
4. Li'liget: Feast
5. Lax yip: House territory
6. Majagalee: Flowers or children
7. Niishnolh: Hereditary Chief
8. Pdeek: Clan
9. SmAlgyax: Gitxsan language
10. Sigidim haanak': Female Chiefs
11. Simgigyet: Male Chief
12. Wilp: Kinship governance, House Group

Introduction

The Project

What we often assume belongs most intimately to ourselves and to our emotional life has been produced elsewhere and has been recruited to do the work of racism and repression.

Angela Y. Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, 2018, p. 181

Even careful plans cannot accommodate or foresee all the tricks of creation.

Louise Erdrich, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, 2001 p.

218

What does it mean to “heal” amidst the ongoing attack on a people and their place? This has always been and remains a central question for Indigenous people around the world who are moved towards liberation from settler colonialism, capitalism, white supremacy and all the destruction brought by those worldviews and systems. This research project takes place within the context of Indigenous resistance, joy and continuity, which have been practiced in response to, and despite, the violence of settler colonialism since its arrival on Indigenous territories. This is a Native queer feminist project as my felt human experience is deeply interwoven with all work I pursue, including and necessarily, this research project. In the process of this work, I ask, what does it mean to live in the tension, in the rough and messy currents of our existence, to hold horror and beauty and continue to move through it? This is a personal and political work, scholarly and communal. It has been inspired by many courageous and caring people that have

proven that we must continue to force our truths into the light, that activism and scholarship, therapeutic and community work require us to honour ourselves and our relations – kinship and solidarity across enforced borders and settler colonial containment.

This research project takes place in “New Hazelton, BC,” on Gitxsan territory, specifically Wilps Nikateen laxyip. There, myself, my sibling Morgan Mowatt, and the Kinship Rising research project were invited to guide workshops with all 100+ students at New Hazelton Elementary School (NHES) and support the creation of a mural to honour the Gitxsan Nation, land, community, culture, youth, in all their resistance and reclamation. The research took place over a three-week period in May and June 2023 at NHES, the entire project running between April 2023 and November 2023. We were honoured to have Pansy Wright- Simms, Gitxsan Matriarch and community organizer and leader, as the community liaison for the project; her role was to facilitate between community needs and what we could offer as Kinship Rising researchers. Pansy surveyed the community and found the need for a anti-colonial Gitxsan arts-based wellness project at New Hazelton Secondary School and she connected us with the staff and faculty there. We ran workshops for three weeks with the students at NHES and the outcomes of those workshops inspired a mural by Gitxsan artist Michelle Stoney, which was painted with the help of NHES students and is on permanent display on the exterior of the school. We concluded the project with a celebratory all-clans Feast that was hosted by the students at the school and supported by the faculty and staff in November 2023.

This research is supported by an Indigenous-led, arts-based, community-based research project entitled Kinship Rising, funded by a SSHRC Insight grant and the Canet Foundation. Kinship Rising invites Indigenous young people of all genders to participate in conversations, stories and art making to centre dignity, wellbeing, and kinship connections, restore Indigenous

land-body relations, and promote healing from colonial gender violence (kinshiprising.uvic.ca). Since 2018, Kinship Rising's Principal Investigator, Dr Sandrina Carere, has supported my work with Kinship rising, which includes a mural workshop at the 2018 Kinship Rising forum that included Indigenous youth participants from across Canada and South Africa involved in community projects including arts-based and land-based wellness and resistance workshops. Through my work as a Research Facilitator with Kinship Rising, I learned from and with the youth, community members, and other Kinship Rising researchers about how to conduct arts-based, land-based approaches to Indigenous youth wellness and resistance. In this work, along with community organizing and relationships, and my personal experiences with resistance to settler colonialism, I have engaged in discussion about what healing and wellness means in our current social, political and spiritual climate.

As I explain in the following chapters, "healing" as a concept is loaded with meaning and often does not work to consider the presences of ongoing violence in the lives of targeted oppressed groups – specifically excluding the systems and structures of white supremacy, settler colonialism, and patriarchy that shape the lives and experiences of those groups. Therefore, to reinstall those missing frameworks into wellness narratives within this research project, reclamations of power, agency, groundedness, joy, resistance, refusal and love, based on an anti-colonial and liberatory frameworks are centered.

Who I am

I am 'Nijogamlax lits t'aa from Wilp Luutkudziiwus and Xsimwitjiin. I grew up on Snuneymuxw and Snaw'naw'as territory with my Father Jack Mowatt, Gitxsan and removed from his paternal family as part of the 60's scoop, my Mother, Janie Mowatt, of white settler decent, and my sibling, Morgan Mowatt. I am 2psirit (they/them and she/her pronouns), and I

also live with the gifts and challenges of neurodiversity. My desire to find language and a framework to help me understand my own and my families' experiences in the world led me to the First Nations studies program at Vancouver Island University. From there, I found numerous roles in the field of Indigenous health, education, and NGO organizing that gave me the opportunity to be part of community and eventually me pushed for greater understanding of systems and structures of settler colonial violence. I then attended the Master of Arts program in the History department at UVic. I consulted with my Uncle, Niishnoolh (Ray Jones) about what research I should do for my thesis. Niishnoolh has been an advocate for Indigenous self-determination, education, and liberation for decades. In our conversations about my research, Niishnoolh invited me to work with the Gyets Gitxsan Indian Residential School Survivor (IRS) group to create content for a curriculum on the Gitxsan experience with IRS. Gyets Gitxsan IRS is a group of elders, Simgigyet, Sigidimhanak, and survivors who create programming around healing and cultural reclamation and resurgence for IRS survivors and their families in the western Gitxsan communities.

Between 2017 and 2020, my sibling Morgan and I interviewed Gitxsan elders, Simogyet, and other Survivors to ensure our work was grounded by their perspectives and to gather content for the curriculum. Although stories of suffering and violence were shared with us, an overwhelming message presented throughout the interviews was that young people in our Nation need to be supported in connecting with who they are as Gitxsan. This was acknowledged as a resistance to the goal of IRS, which was to create a collective amnesia in our Nation of who we are and where we come from via violence inflicted by government and church administrators. The interviews included stories, memories and nightmares recalled from IRS, Indian Day school, Indian Hospitals, and varying violent colonial interventions into Gitxsan life. Yet, the survivors'

focus remained on the future for Gali Aks Gitxsan (people on the river of mist). This project helped instill in me the importance of knowing who I am, my responsibility to my community, and an orientation to supporting spaces where Gitxsan youth experience joy, love, resistance and belonging as Gitxsan on our territories. This project inspired me to move in the direction of Child and Youth Care, specifically to work with Gitxsan youth around resistance-based connection to self, community and place.

Another part of my life that guided me into work around wellness and resistance with youth is my experience with community-driven direct action and organized resistance to settler colonialism. In my experience with organized resistance on Gitxsan Lax Yip, Wet'suwet'en Yintah, WSÁNEĆ, and Lekwungen territories, I witnessed and was a part of incredible amounts of power, love, connection and world building among local and diasporic Indigenous community members, elders, and youth.

Experiences with high-stress and high-stakes situations, such as blocking ferries, highways and bridges, marching and rallying through trafficked city streets, occupying government offices, occupying land-based resistance camps, and most significantly, a four-week Indigenous youth-led occupation and blockade of the BC Legislature, I witnessed and felt a suffering alongside the power and resistance that was very alive within our movement and our relationships with ourselves and each other. This legacy of suffering has been inflicted onto Indigenous people historically via colonial violence of IRS, day schools, 60's scoop, gender-based violence, disenfranchisement, surveillance, land-theft, etc. and continues currently via colonial institutions such as child welfare, MMIW2s+, economic subjugation, ongoing land theft and destruction, among other colonial tools of disempowerment. This suffering caused by physical and psychological warfare is upheld by ongoing settler colonialism, through neoliberal

frameworks of individualism, child theft, pathologization, and the many shapeshifting facets of settler colonial genocide (Starblanket, 2018; Woolford et. al, 2014). The psychological violence of white supremacy and settler colonialism continues to live within us and our communities – often sneaking outside of ourselves and into our relationships disguised as anger, shame, depersonalization, among other survival mechanisms. Indigenous and Black feminist activists and scholars have been forcing us to contend with the personal and intimate felt experiences as political for decades (Barker, 2017; Green, 2007; Nash, 2019). This work allows us to contend with the inherited legacies of settler colonial violence within us, while also forging forward with our power and overwhelming love and resistance. A wholesome approach to resistance, real liberation, centers the personal as political in our work and existence and comes from an Indigenous queer and feminist felt approach (hooks, 2014; Hunt and Holmes, 2015; Lorde, 1984; Million, 2013).

My experiences over the years in community and academia have informed me that the project of resisting the violence of settler colonialism on our lands, waters and bodies must include and center tending to our internalized and felt legacies of settler colonial violence. Through exploring the ways that we have been affected by intentional and insidious attacks on our minds, bodies, spirits and nationhood by settler colonialism, we can navigate and move with more care, capacity and curiosity in our world-building movements. We deserve, and it is our responsibility, to attend to our collective experiences with settler colonial violence as it must be part of ongoing resistance to colonial projects of dispossession. It is important to note that this does not mean that we can “heal” settler colonialism away, that we can somehow do so much work on ourselves that the violence ends, and we are no longer affected by the continual attacks on our bodies, lands, waters and spirits. We cannot create safety in our bodies by our own will

and resilience while our bodies remain under attack by the settler state – to claim to do that is to erase the reality of the ongoing violent occupation of Indigenous lands, culture, communities, and families and the brutality that necessitates Canada’s sovereignty. We are deserving of finding ways to create peace, security and love in our bodies, our families and our communities, and we can do this while simultaneously acknowledging that the harm and violence of settler colonialism continues regardless of how much healing we do (Clark, 2016).

Ourselves and the coming generations deserve to find ways to access joy, peace, love, and wellness, yet it is not only wrong, but is harmful to assert that we can heal our way out of problems that are being caused by the current settler colonial regime. The “problem” remains within the genocidal settler logic of elimination and Canada’s need to destroy Indigenous lands and bodies to assert its sovereignty (Manuel & Derrickson, 2015; Simpson, 2019). The problem is not located in Indigenous bodies; therefore, we cannot expel the problem of settler colonialism by “healing” our bodies. We do, however, have the power to become more aware of what we have inherited and how it can shape our relationships and (re)produce dynamics that we are trying to expunge. Naming the pain and warfare that we can carry inside of us as settler colonial violence, forgiving ourselves for how we have been forced to survive, and seeking the parts of us that ground us and connect us to our knowledge and power (our birthright) must be a part of our resistance work. These acts of love towards ourselves and each other in our collectives can be understood as a refusal to settler colonialism and its goals. It is also the greatest gift we can give to the coming generations who will continue this fight; this is the guiding light of this research project.

On My Own Use Felt Theory

Thus, in trying to imagine and feel our human desires, I find the abstraction

sometimes necessary in explanation hugely sterile and lacking key parts of the strength of resistance.

Million, 2013, p. 30

My role in this research project was to be a conductor to many important pieces that have come together to realize the dream of a mural project with the students at NHES. As noted above, the plans for the research project were created through the input of community members, students, teachers, and Kinship Rising facilitators and inspired by my own experiences. I will speak to further inspiration below, but first I will explain what it means for me to be the person responsible for this experience and my main objectives as a researcher and project lead. In the book, “Therapeutic Nations: Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights” (2013), Dian Million explores how the exile of affective experiences of settler colonialism from political formulations of struggle for our liberation shapes our current political and social landscapes. Million draws on Indigenous feminist work that invites us to contend with the gendered discourse of our struggle and the neoliberal frameworks that we have been offered as our path toward liberation. Million brings us into a politic of affect that challenges the gendered modes of resistance we have inherited from the state. I have centred affect in my methodology as a way to contest heteronormative settler colonial dominance of knowledge production. Million’s felt theory is animated by “community knowledge, knowledge that interactively informs our positions as Indigenous scholars, particularly as Indigenous women scholars” (p. 57). Felt theory offers a resistance to the sterile patriarchal and misogynistic practices of research that continues to remain the dominant and legitimate source of knowledge production in academia today. Million states: “Our felt scholarship continues to be segregated as a “feminine” experience or as

polemic, or, at worst, not as knowledge at all” (p. 57). In my process of restoring myself, both personally, as a researcher and community member, drawing on felt theory as process and method to my work is a form of reclamation and resistance.

Million draws on the concept of *agonistic* to express the tension of contending ideologies as an Indigenous person in academia, noting that “Hanssen used the notion of the agon, the agonist, not to capture antagonism, the rough edges, but the products of their interaction, the theses that they produce together, however strenuously” (2013, p 27). The concept of agon permits all of Million to be present in the work, and the process and outcome of the tension itself is the space occupied – Million does not attempt to synthesize these parts nor silo them, but honour what is produced from in the friction whole.

Felt theory then instructs me to show up with all parts of myself to my work. Authority as Indigenous people comes from an ancestral right and way of being that we are born into relationship with, and the source of certain concepts runs through us and with us. Concepts of our governance, laws, ways of being and knowing, do not come from the outside-in, but come from relationship with all of existence. To be creation, to be living our laws, is to be in one shared spirit with land, water, and all living beings – “all that ever was and all that ever will be” (Lattie, 2023). To be creation is to be in fluidity with the webs of all creation, and to be accountable and responsible to the whole (Smith, 2004). In affective research, we are called upon to include every piece of ourselves, our communities, and our relationships with all beings and spirit in a way which is a refusal of patriarchal heteronormative research expectations, also known as objective research.

The roots of felt and affective politics can be traced to BIPOC queer feminist scholars, activists and artists. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s anthology, *This Bridge Called My*

Back: Writings by Radical Women of Colour, addresses racism in queer and feminist spaces, challenges to white feminism, and an initiation into a world of BIPOC queer feminist politics. Moraga's claims that BIPOC queer feminism is "about a physical and psychic struggle. It is about intimacy, a desire for life between all of us, not settling for less than freedom even in the most private aspects of our lives. A total vision" (1983, p. xlix). Third World feminism, as it is articulated in the anthology, attends to the borders created between women of colour, black and Indigenous and women of the diaspora. This is a felt expression of politics: "A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives – our kin colour, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings – all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity." (1983, p. 21) This BIPOC queer feminist approach to our political expressions causes me to ask: if we are not showing up as all of who we are, what are we creating?

Tlalilila'ogwa/Sarah Hunt explores agonistic felt embodiment in the article *Ontologies of Indigeneity: The Politics of Embodying a Concept* (2014) and illustrates the complexities of drawing on Indigenous ontologies within academia. Hunt asks: "If Indigenous sovereignty can only be attained through self-affirmation, how do we reconcile the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge, and ourselves as Indigenous people, in those dominant institutions?" (Hunt, 2014). Thus, our existence as Indigenous peoples *is* Indigenous knowledge, and within settler colonial institutions we do not seize to exist as Indigenous but find ways to navigate the academy so that we don't get disappeared or compromise who we are. Therefore, my becoming has been centered around re-presenting my body, my authority and birthright, and resisting the ways that settler colonialism, white supremacy, heteronormativity are attempting to force me out of my body and make me feel unsafe or inherently flawed in my body and all that I am – an attack on

my sources of power. Part of my resistance within this academic research project is to actively work on bringing all of myself to my work as I move through the process of the research.

This felt method allows me to follow my desire to account for myself as part of this research and to play within multitudes of my being while finding a ground for others in this work to be themselves and comfortable to show up in all that they are. My main goal each day I showed up for this work was to be present in moments by resisting inherited mental and emotional impacts of settler colonial, white supremacy, misogyny that aim to force me out of my body and my power. This resistance became inspiration to try to be present each day of this research project with NHES - to be able to be found and seen by the those who were meant to be there and to connect with me (human and non-human) and create what needed to be for the participants in our work. To be present moment by moment was to honour the relationships and the people who were showing up for this vision and this project - my presence and embodiment stolen from me for most of my life from lineages of settler colonialism and misogyny, were being restored through this work.

I believe that this aspect of our work as Indigenous researchers is often overlooked or erased as capitalism and settler colonialism do not encourage or reward us for this type of labour. We are often incentivised to engage in the opposite, to be un-feeling and disconnected from ourselves and our inherent value as humans who are part of large webs of community and accountability. Because of the violence of settler colonialism, and its history in my body and my families, I will never become fully “healed”. Being fully healed, scholar Natalie Clark suggests is colonial construct that erases the reality of ongoing attacks on our bodies, lands, waters and communities (Clark, 2016). In resistance to neoliberal white supremacist essentialism that tells us we must become fully “healed” in order to be of worth, I instead wake up and work hard for

presence, for peace and space in my mind, refusing the voices of settler colonial hatred (Clark, 2016). This work is spiritual, grounded and supported by elders and people in my community that connect me to myself and our collective.

During this research project, a significant goal was to silence those voices, to fend off that endless settler colonial monologue that tells me I am not worthy or capable of doing this work. I fight to honour my gifts, my path, and my teachers and guides who have allowed me to do this work. At this time, I was also taking a medication, that for the first time in my life quieted the cycling voice of self-hatred, it helped, but I still had to work hard to show up grounded, planted in the earth, and upwardly connected to all spirit and faith of goodness in the world. This to me is the most significant element of my methodology and the foundation of this research; it is my own personal frontline resistance to settler colonial violence that is determined to see us hate ourselves. The question I continued to ask myself, which has been reiterated by elders in my life in some form or another over the past decade was: Who benefits when you doubt yourself? And, more importantly, who benefits when you believe in your gifts? The doubt I have for myself and my skills, knowledge, gifts, efforts, only benefits settler colonialism and white supremacy's goals, and when I believe in myself, it benefits our community, and chips away toward a future unburdened by worldviews of the oppressors. This is a great inspiration to my personal refusal of settler colonialisms claim on my mind, body, spirit and relationships.

In this research project, I relied on my relationship with art and spirit as a practice of reflecting and processing the work. I explored how arts-based and spiritual processes accompany me in being with and expressing ideas, feelings, visions, connections, and reflections that have come from doing this work in and with my community, on my homelands as a displaced Gitksan person. I also brought into consideration the ways that art and spiritual processes support me in

doing this work within my neurodivergence and how engaging with art and spirit can act as a challenge to dominant expectations of western knowledge production (Mowatt, et. al. 2022).

Using arts processes in research can allow us to explore our work unbounded from certain constraints of settler colonial imposed worldviews to give space for felt perspectives and expressions beyond what whiteness encourages from us (Mowatt et. al., 2022). Arts-based and land-based methods reflect the values of tactile learning and engagement and make possible a mode of communicating our thoughts, feelings, and experiences from spirit, body and felt sense untethered from settler epistemologies and ontologies. My art processes and spiritual experiences honour what can't be said and what can't be seen, but what is there, here; shaping and shifting our worlds, and keeping us on our toes.

Contextual framing

The fields of Indigenous health studies, Indigenous healing and Indigenous child, youth and family studies have been growing over the past decade, largely due to the disclosures of Indian Residential School survivors, and subsequently the rise of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; the current era of healing we are in today (Million, 2013; Vanthuyne & Capitaine, 2017). This has led to the pathologization of Indigenous trauma and an ushering in of healing as the pathway toward Indigenous liberation. In Chapter Two I problematize the pathologization of Indigenous bodies that occurs when through neoliberal agendas, all Indigenous people are marked as trauma victims, subsequently carrying out the narrative that necessitates settler colonial surveillance and intervention: a damaged and dependant Indigenous subject not able to self-govern. The unhealed trauma victim becomes the new "Indian Problem" (de Finney et. al., 2019; Million, 2013).

Literature on Indigenous healing, and Indigenous child, youth and family studies in the field of Child and Youth Care attempts to find ways to heal the new Indian problem – often ignoring the neoliberal foundations of current dominant healing paradigms (Clark, 2016; de Finney, et. al., 2019; Hunt, 2015; Million, 2013; Reynolds, 2020). Perhaps not surprisingly, the healing and helping fields follow similar patterns of state politics, which labour to include Indigenous cultural markers in otherwise harmful settler colonial state projects in the name of reconciliation and recognition (Coulthard, 2014). This means that settler healing paradigms are sprinkled with Indigenous language or symbolism that illude to reconciliatory programming, yet the frameworks themselves continue to serve settler-state interests and are made for “healing” white bodies and pathologizing othered bodies (de Finney, et. al., 2019; Million, 2013; Reynolds, 2020). A failure within the field of child, youth and community care is evidenced in the attempts to address trauma and healing of Indigenous people while overwhelmingly denying the ongoing violence of settler colonialism that causes the suffering (Clark, 2016; Dhillion, 2017; deFinney, et. al., 2019). Refusal to name the “hand” of violence continues to inflict intentional harm and fosters the ongoing destruction of Indigenous bodies, lands and futures. This erasure of systemic and structural violence is enacted in the everydayness of intimate relationships with people, places, and institutions of settler colonialism, including in therapeutic spaces and social realms (Hunt and Holmes, 2015). The unwillingness to disclose white supremacy and settler colonialism as the sources of violence in helping and healing discourse and practice reinforces the pathologization of Indigenous bodies and leads us to the assumption that the “problem” or trauma is inherent within ourselves and our communities.

Unfortunately, the norm of research practices with Indigenous people and youth continues to remain deficit-based and looks toward settler approaches to heal or fix Indigenous

problems to rehabilitate future generations into the logics of a settler state (de Finney et. al. 2019; Million, 2013; Reynolds, 2020). This glaring settler colonial erasure in the field has inspired me to employ refusal a founding principle in my research with Gitxsan youth (Simpson, 2007). Therefore, the methodological and theoretical framing of my work draws on a felt approach to harness power, resistance, love, and care by acknowledging settler colonial violence, while maintaining sight and connection to world-building that we must do within and alongside ongoing violence and brutality. Inspired by youth-led research projects, including Kinship Rising, and Native Youth Sexual Health Network (deFinney, 2018; NYSHN, 2011), I believe that my research illustrates how we can do community-based research with youth in ways that are beneficial to them, that are not extractive, and do not pathologize and do not intend to save or redeem them. This is an important contribution to the field as Indigenous wellness - in particular Indigenous youth wellness - is becoming increasingly popular among researchers and academics in the current age of reconciliation.

Situating the work

I understand this work to being ever-flowing, connected and implicated in a mass of ideas and experiments grounded by relationships, teachings and accountabilities. It has been shaped by many important people, past, present and future, by ancestors and spirit guides, by lands and waters and by children, youth, babies, elders, mothers, aunties, kin. It has also been shaped by the requirements of a school district, federal funding accountability, and university research standards. It is defined by resistance, rage, care, laughter and along the way connections and points of manifestation of Gitxsan love and power which expand and create. Creation is

constant - having intentions around creation is powerful and necessary, therefore felt experiencing as part of methodology is central, I detail this in Chapter One.

Dissertation overview

The main questions that inspired my work with NHES, youth and our Gitxsan community research project are: How can I, as a researcher, carry Gitxsan values while working with children and youth to inspire a space that allows for engagement in arts based and medicine-based explorations of self and community? How can a project that engages the community, elders, artists, students, and researchers facilitate in self-exploration, grounding, and belonging for Gitxsan children and youth at NHES? What does it look like to engage with public art-based self-representation as a practice of liberation, love, self-knowledge, and Gitxsan world building with youth in a school setting? How can research be used to bring in resources and opportunity for Indigenous/community-led projects without extracting or causing harm, resisting pathologization and deficit-based frameworks?

This dissertation explores the research objectives listed above through the following chapters: *Introduction; Chapter One: Fractured knowledges: Building a Critical Gitxsan Methodology for Visions for Youth Healing; Chapter Two: Therapeutic Discourses: Pathways of Healing and Resistance with Indigenous youth; Chapter Three: Kinship Rising Research Process and Findings, Chapter Four: Discussion on Resistance-Based Research and Practice and Conclusion: Toward Liberatory Research Processes.*

In *Chapter One: Fractured Knowledges: Building a Critical Gitxsan Methodology for visions for youth Liberation*, I explore the possibility of drawing from a Gitxsan worldview to inform a critical felt methodology. I consider how land-based arts-based practices can work

within this critical felt Gitxsan methodology. Gitxsan worldview, and my felt experience of it, can be the foundation for a critically engaged felt methodological practice (Hunt and Simpson, 2023). The laws and protocols of engagement that come from a Gitxsan worldview inform ethical and responsible research and allow me to refuse settler colonial categories and demands for cooptation and assimilation. This Gitxsan methodology also shapes land-based and arts-based methods, in that the laws and protocols can guide the process of being on and with place and partaking in creative methods of remembering and felt experiencing.

Chapter Two: Therapeutic Discourses: Pathways of Healing and Resistance with Indigenous Youth, explores the discourses and paradigms of Indigenous healing, the limitations in the field, and potential practices and pathways which allow for resistance and movement outside of settler colonial containment of the Indigenous subject. Although there are limits in the current literature, the work of Carere (previously authored as de Finney) (2017), Million (2013), Clark (2016), Dupuis-Rossi and Reynolds (2019) and the Native Youth Sexual Health Network (2011), to name a few, evidence potential frameworks for wellness work which is subversive and challenging to genocidal settler colonial logics. These learnings inform my work and research with Indigenous youth and communities. Liberatory practices of healing must take into consideration the nuances of ongoing structural, systemic and discourses of settler colonial violence. This chapter informs my conceptual framework for entering a space intent on engaging in healing practices with Gitxsan leaders, youth, and community.

In *Chapter Three: Kinship Rising Research Process and Findings*, I review the preparation and process of my research. I discuss the relationships, values, and methods that shape the research with the students at NHES. This includes the ethics of gift giving, felt experiencing, prayer, art knowledge, presence, and relationality. In this chapter I review the

details of the workshops we led over a two--week period with the school, how that informed the art creation process for the mural, and the feast and celebration that followed the completion of the project. I close by sharing my felt process of integration and creation of and from this project through an arts and spiritual practice.

Chapter Four: Discussion on Resistance-Based Research and Practice is where I discuss my methodological approaches and reflect on the literature and theories that have guided this work. I bring pieces of this research project into conversation with themes from my theoretical framework and the literature that has inspired the project and discuss the possible connections within the field, community work and resistance. I reflect on my methodology, my guiding questions, the workshops, and the outcomes of the research and provide thoughts on the field and what this project can teach us about Indigenous, community, and youth-led research that aims to inspire Gitxsan futures and reject the inevitability of settler colonialism.

In conclusion, *Toward Liberatory Research Processes* ties together the learnings from this research project and attempts to honour the relationships, love, and care it took to support me as a researcher/community member/learner on this journey. I've worked to build a dissertation that is accessible (in language and format) for most people to pick up and explore. I labour to honour this work, my Nation, ancestral connections, spiritual connections, everyone involved, and especially the youth who ground this project. I hope also to honour the work I have done with elders, Simgiyet, Sigidimhanak, and IRS survivors who call me to step into the current of Gitxsan resistance and futures.

Chapter One

Fractured knowledges: Building a Critical Gitxsan Methodology for visions for youth Liberation

One of the big teachings from our elders is Ama gya'adihl hen, be careful what you say, Ama gya'adihl win, be careful what you do, Ama gya'adihl hen, be careful what you say because you cannot take those words and put it back in your mouth. An apology is just a smokescreen, because your words are already out there, where can you find it? It's out there, you can't put it back in your mouth, it'll be gone, that's what they've taught us, be careful how you walk, don't step on peoples' toes, because it'll cost you, you'll have to put on a big feast and then, Xsgook dim gukws haldim guutxwin hligook dim hlo'odit 'niin, you gotta pick yourself up, before anybody respects you again

Gwass Hlaam, Mowatt, 2019, p. 45

Felt Methodology

My research with Gitxsan children, youth, and community calls for meaningful consideration of the web of relationships – structural, communal and interpersonal – that must be cared for and held in respect and preciousness. Ethical research methodologies are necessary to ensure that our projects cause as little harm as possible in the work we do within our communities. As a Gitxsan person who has experienced layers of settler colonial displacement, my methodological approach carries the multitudes of my responsibilities and accountabilities which are constantly in motion, ready to be adjusted and adapted. Here, I explore how my approaches to research come together to form a critical felt Gitxsan methodology. I desire for my work to be respectful of where I am writing and doing my research from. I am Gitxsan, yet I will

not share certain knowledge in my academic work. If I were to try to create a Gitxsan methodology based on the assumption that I have a complete Gitxsan worldview, it would not be an authentic expression of my knowledge or my status in our governance system. The Gitxsan knowledge that I do carry comes from my yearning to reconnect with my family, community, and Nation. My father was adopted into a white family as a part of the 60's scoop. His reconnection to his birth family when I was a baby has allowed me to grow up with a small understanding of what it means to be Gitxsan. As I have gotten older, this understanding has grown and I have a responsibility to further reconnect and orient myself and my work towards understanding settler colonial genocide and its ongoing legacy within my family and community, learning and experiencing Gitxsan worldviews, law and governance values and principles, and participating in resistance movements that seek to abolish ongoing settler colonial violence on Gitxsan territory and beyond.

The methods we used for this project are arts-based, community-led, and workshop formatted. We employed an anti-oppressive and liberatory framework and chose questions for the workshops that allowed the students to interpret and make sense of them from their own expertise and lived experience. The arts-based methods we used were inspired by the Fearless Collective. This collective was created by Shilo Shiv-Suleman, a feminist Indian artist who creates and runs arts-based workshops in spaces affected by settler colonialism and imperialism around the globe. Shiv-Suleman's methods are based on transmutation and catharsis, of healing and resistance stories being witnessed in communities and shared publicly on murals as an act of self-representation (Shiv-Suleman, 2017). We use the Fearless methodology as:

... a liberatory praxis, inviting communities to imagine a world without fear in the face of colonial and gendered violence. Fearless methodology moves fear to love and reclaims

physical public spaces to cocreate art capturing the public imagination. (Mowatt, et. al., 2022, p. 237)

We asked questions in our workshops that we hoped would leave the students feeling connected to their own resources; their strength, power, and agency. The guiding questions call into consideration our connections, our networks of love and support, both human and non-human. From the beginning of planning sessions for the research project, we included Gitxsan women to support and witness the work. We brought in medicines to work with and to be in connection with as we led the workshops.

In traditional settler modalities of research and scholarship, we are often trained to be objective in our work (McIvor, 2010; Smith, 1999; Conrad, 2022; Tallbear, 2013; Tuck, 2009). Gitxsan knowledges challenge me to acknowledge that I am connected to and responsible in relationships to spirit, to each other, to all living beings, coming generations, and in relationship to the intangible. Some anti-colonial research methodologies suggest that it is important to be present, to reflect, to become felt with our work and to give space for learnings and findings outside of our assumptions (Smith, 2009). Bringing myself into my body, out of thoughts and busyness, into spiritual and arts practice, is necessary for me to become present in my work and in my roles in the community, to acknowledge the depth of the current that flows from past generations to current and future.

In honouring Gitxsan governance practices, we asked permission from those whose territory we were on, we gifted all those who helped and witnessed the work, we planned with Gitxsan matriarchs along the way to ensure we were respecting our laws and protocols, and we held a feast (governance gathering) to commemorate the work we did together to produce the mural in honor of the youth at the school. The youth took part in each step of the process and

served at the feast, this was to demonstrate that we respect their agency and autonomy in this project. Although we did not spend time on the “land” per se, we were on Gitxsan territory as we did the work, we honored this by following Gitxsan protocol and knowledge as we did our workshops and prepared for the mural. The mural itself was meant in part to represent the place the school is on, as a reminder of the Gitxsan nation and the commitment that must be made to honour the Gitxsan children and their birthright at the school. The medicines we used in the workshops were meant to connect the youth to place and the medicines of our territories and their teachings - although the medicines did not come from Gitxsan territory, the connection to the plant world was enacted – the connection to “land”, and this also reflects my place as a diasporic Gitxsan and the limits and gifts of my offerings and where I am coming from.

The purpose, then, of having a critical felt methodology that is informed by Gitxsan worldview, is for me to reflect on what I have learned over the years living and experiencing as a displaced Gitxsan person and implement that into my work as a refusal of settler colonial epistemologies. Some questions that guided my reflections on a critically felt Gitxsan methodology are as follows: How can I articulate what I am accountable to and what I know of Gitxsan ethics, ontology and epistemology in my methodology? What can a felt methodology do? How can I apply a critical queer and gender analysis to this methodology? How do land and arts-based healing paradigms fit within a Gitxsan methodology? The literature here are drawn from the fields of Political Science, Health, Law, anthropology, Child and Youth Care, and Sociology, among others.

As a community-based project, we were guided by epistemologies which are not necessarily documented within academic institutions and do not need to be. In attempting to explain some of the knowledge that guides this work, I fail, as Gitxsan knowledge is felt and

carried in relation through actions, stories, songs, dance, and feasting governance practices, among other methods (Smith, 2005). I try my best to acknowledge where certain knowledges come from which I have inherited over many years of learning and experiencing with my family, community and Nation. Yet, some of the knowledge that I draw on in this dissertation is not citable by the time and space of my inheritance, as it is not marked by dates in my mind.

Indigenous Methodologies

I begin the conversation on what inspires my methodological approach by referencing pillars of cross-disciplinary Indigenous methodology frameworks. These offerings illustrate the work that has been done to produce frameworks for Indigenous scholars engaging in their own knowledge production, within ongoing settler colonial occupation, to support Indigenous strength and resistance in academia. In the foundational work, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith insists that if we are to resist ongoing settler colonialism in research, we must do our work in ways that honour and uphold Indigenous knowledges and engage in research practices that show respect to our people and our communities (Smith, 1999). Similarly, Shawn Wilson (2008) outlines an Indigenous methodology that offers an alternative to colonial research methodologies by centering Indigenous ways of knowing and being in our work. Smith (1999) and Wilson (2008) work to create spaces for Indigenous scholars to build on their knowledges outside of constricting and reductive western research modalities. Building on this work further, Kathleen Absolon (2011) reviews and discusses several Indigenous researchers' methodologies and explores how Indigenous worldviews can inform and create good Indigenous research. Absolon describes

Indigenous methodologies as “wholistic, relational, interrelational and interdependent with Indigenous philosophies, beliefs and ways of life” (2011, p. 25).

The guiding principles from these Indigenous methodologies advocate for Indigenous scholars to be who they are and honour their knowledges and accountabilities in their work. The above scholars have invited me to step out of the mainstream settler colonial conceptualizations of research and into an honouring of who I am and the knowledges that shape and my community. Absolon, Wilson and Smith outline general guidelines and theories that shape Indigenous and decolonial methodologies and are helpful in guiding Indigenous scholars to move within an Indigenous framework that is less colonial and harmful to themselves and their communities (2011, 2008, 1999). However helpful, more generalized Indigenous methodologies do not provide the type of Nation- and place-specific analysis that is essential for my development of a Gitxsan methodology. To create a methodology informed by my understanding of Gitxsan values and principles, I must contend with the complex politics of Gitxsan knowledge production and my place within it.

Producing Indigenous Knowledge within Colonial Institutions

As discussed in the introduction, Tłaliłila’ogwa/Sarah Hunt’s (2014) exploration of embodiment helps unpack and understand the experiences of Indigenous bodies in the context of academic spaces. Hunt brings us into conversation with what *Indigeneity* and *ontology* truly mean as concepts for us to properly analyze and discuss how and if they could be honoured within academic institutions that are entrenched in lineages of settler colonial and white supremacist knowledge systems. Hunt posits “how do we reconcile the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge, and ourselves as Indigenous people, in those dominant institutions?” (2014, p. 28)

This is a central question for the creation of a critically felt Gitksan methodology as I balance my position within Gitksan governance structures, my experiences with mutual aid organizing and activism, and my responsibilities to my family, community, and my work within academia.

Hunt (2014) illustrates moving between university classrooms and sacred ceremonies, by using the metaphor of shapeshifting and dancing - moving between different sites of knowledge production, different worlds. This brings me to consider what sites of settler colonial knowledge production ask of Indigenous academics who are committed to their own knowledge systems and to Indigenous futures, against settler futures. To create a critically felt Gitksan methodology, I must consider the constant presence of genocidal settler colonial logics in academic work and what is being asked of me as a Gitksan academic and researcher as I shapeshift across multiple boundaries of community and academic belonging and reclaiming stolen identities. This is worthy to be aware of, as academic institutions seek to co-opt Indigeneity into a commodity that violently erases the political nature of what it is to be Indigenous, the complexities of our identity and kinship, and the laws and governance that we are a part of and responsible to (Mowatt, 2023; Tuck and Yang, 2012). It is worth noting here as well that my scholarship is relational in many ways. Above, I reference the work of my sibling, and throughout I reference many people I am in relation within community, in friendship and in resistance. This is important to note because who I am, and the work I do, is made up of all the conversation, questions, creations, and challenges with and from those I share my life with. It is an honour to reference them in acknowledgment of how their thoughts, ideas and critiques shape my work and life both on and off paper.

Refusal as methodology

There is a painful distinction between being taken from the world and not being given a world in the first place.

(Belcourt, 2016, para. 9)

Audra Simpson refuses the settler colonial categorizations of the “native” in her article, “On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, “Voice” and Colonial Citizenship” (2007). Simpson explains that Indigenous people are ontologically held captive via the categorizations of settler colonial containment. In this article, Simpson demonstrates how the academic enforcement of settler categorizing of Indigenous people into containable and legible subjects remains a site of ongoing genocidal erasure of Indigenous people and Nations. This work helps us understand how voyeuristic and extractive research inquiries have been weaponized against Indigenous communities in the service of settler colonial regimes, and how that works to fix Indigenous peoples in time and space – becoming malleable subjects of the state. Mapping the political landscape of their Nation, community, and position as an Indigenous scholar and researcher, Simpson explains that “in such a context, I knew that there were limits to what you could ask – and then what I could say - within the scope of my project on Mohawk nationhood, and those limits extended beyond any statement on theoretical forms of research.” Instead, the work “pivoted upon refusal(s)” (2007, 73). Simpson’s research explores Mohawk refusal as a felt practice which animates all interactions with the state, border guards and everyday encounters with outsiders. This practice of refusal becomes central to the building of my critical felt Gitksan methodology. Simpson’s resistance to the projections and perceptions of settler colonial

imaginaries based on the premise of refusal shows an alternative route for Indigenous research to follow in a way that can feel ethical and aligned with our places in our own governance structures and contexts of resistance and survival.

Refusal as a concept allows me to honour my place within the Gitxsan Nation; to refuse to share what is not mine to share, regardless of academic or social pressures to do so. I refuse to perform Indigeneity, or to allow my Gitxsan identity to be validated within a destructive and degrading “category” which academia and settler society have created to continuously control and displace our communities (Coulthard, 2014; Manuel & Derrikson, 2015; Simpson, 2017).

Jodi Byrd (2011) mobilizes the term transit to refer to the “cultural and political modes of Indianess” which are often understood as the opposite; “rooted and static, located in a discrete place” (p. XVI). We survive in transit, in transmotion, we refuse in our liminal, un-readable, untrustworthy, ungovernable existence that haunts the state (Viznor, 2009). This liminal and uncontainable movement is an energy that lives in me and my work, I am inspired by queer and BIPOC feminist scholarships and art that supports us bringing all our humanity to the work we do.

The need to call into question harmful epistemological frameworks as Indigenous researchers and community workers is not limited to only those offered directly by settler colonial bodies. In questioning the exclusion of black queer feminism from mainstream white feminist movements, Audre Lorde asks: “what does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy” (1983, p. 106)? Critiquing movements and frameworks that are supposed to be for Indigenous people by Indigenous people, that are reinforcing harmful erasure, which ends up deadly for some, is necessary if we are to create knowledges and worlds that honour all that settler colonialism tries to steal (Belcourt, 2016).

Tłaliłila'ogwa/Sarah Hunt and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson grapple with the fraught and gendered politics that are the foundations of Indigenous Resurgence theory in their article, "Thinking through Resurgence Together: A Conversation between Tłaliłila'ogwa/Sarah Hunt and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson." (2023) Hunt, who has spent decades in community activism and anti-violence work expresses witnessing how this growing theory "has and has not translated into activist and community circles" (p 130), prompting us to consider who and what the growing theory serves and represents. The foundation of Indigenous Resurgences models built on the unchallenged masculinist and patriarchal influences of how we conceptualize land and culture and resistance, may do more to reinforce colonial violence than our movements have yet come to terms with. "Two-spirit and queer peoples and issues have often not been centred in resurgence work. Anti-violence work has not been present in resurgence work to the degree it must be," (p 129) asserts Simpson, inspiring us to acknowledge the misogynist roots of Indigenous Resurgence theory, and how it defines what is and is not allowed to be Indigenous, what is and it not to be fought for and protected. The harmful erasure of gender-based and sexualized violence in the foundations of Indigenous Resurgence theory not only upholds physical and sexualized violence against our women, queer, trans and 2spirit people, but it creates a blueprint to build worlds that continue to be shaped by the most oppressive aspects of settler colonial white supremacy. To again quote Audre Lorde: "it means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable." (1983, p. 106).

Billy-Ray Belcourt's article "Can the Other of Native Studies Speak?" (2016) claims the impossibility of the Native subject of Native studies to be queer marks a false neutrality in the field. Belcourt examines roots of Native Studies that center the Native as given and challenges us to understand the Native subject that inspires the creation of theories and frameworks for

resistance is gendered, it is a straight cis-man. Women, queer, trans and 2spirit Indigenous people are othered within liberatory frameworks that are allegedly made for us, we are othered, but mostly we don't exist there at all. This issue does not necessarily call for adding Indigenous women, queer, trans, 2spirit people atop these foundations, but for a complete disavowal of Indigenous theories and frameworks that assume a Native subject as cis-hetero man. As Belcourt asserts, it is not a challenge to be included into the field, but a call to acknowledge that the field itself is premised on "epistemologies that build worlds that can't hold us all" (para. 11).

This felt methodology is in honour of the work of queer and feminist BIPOC scholars, community members, activist and artists that create worlds in spaces that have not allow them life, to those that have continued to expand us into the future by existing as everything we are told does not and should not exist. I have found a home in their words.

The Gitxsan worldview

Here, I begin to consider what it means to inform my research theoretical and practical approaches from the Gitxsan worldview. As mentioned above, the Gitxsan Worldview that I have access to is "incomplete." This reflects my displacement from Gitxsan knowledge due to settler colonialism's many attempts to attack our knowledge and kinship systems. Yet, the knowledge I do hold, the teachings and learnings that I have been exposed to over my life in bits and pieces and experiences, are whole within me. This knowledge guides me, it shapes me and informs my path forward. Therefore, I will attempt to express how Gitxsan knowledge will inform my methodology the best I can.

In reference to Gitxsan worldview, I draw on the work of certain published works on Gitxsan experiences and representation (Joseph, 1989; Monet and Skanu'u, 1992; Smith 2004).

The Gitksan have a rich history of resistance to colonial occupation dating back to the first settler colonial intrusions on our territories. This reflects the relationship the Gitksan have with the place, waters and spirit world which has been described as a marriage between the Chief and all that is within their territory (Joseph, 1989). Gitksan resistance to settler colonialism in all its forms varies from direct action to everyday tactics of survival. A notable effort by the Gitksan and their neighbours, the Wet'suwet'en, in resisting the ongoing colonial occupation of their territories and breaching of their laws, is the Delgamuukw court case, which started in 1989 and ended ten years later in 1999 (Monet and Skanu'u, 1992).

In *Colonialism on Trial: Indigenous Land Rights and the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en Sovereignty Case*, Gitksan SigdimHanak (Matriarch), Ardyth Wilson, and Don Monet review the *Delgamuukw v British Columbia* court case from a Gitksan perspective (1992). *Delgamuukw*, as it is commonly referred as, was an attempt by the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en nations to gain recognition from Canada of their full ownership and jurisdiction over their territories. The court case lasted ten years and is known for the ground-breaking way Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en oral histories (songs and stories) were used within colonial courts as evidence of lineages of governance, jurisdiction and sovereignty (Mowatt, 2023). In most cases over the 10-year hearings, the Adaawk and Ayook, oral histories and laws, were disrespected by the crown and their legal teams by way of racist and misogynistic mockery, dismissal and dehumanization. In his opening statement, Gitksan Simogyet (Chief), Ken Muldoe recalls the sentiments of the late Simogyet Delgamuukw (Albert Tait) regarding the implications of the racist disrespect of the crown during the court case: "Chiefs will not receive the proper respect from the government. If they are wearing their regalia, then the shame of the disrespect will be costly to erase" (Monet and Skanu'u, 1992, p. 22). Tait illustrates the pitfalls of baring sacred knowledge and practices

in attempts to get recognition from the state. In Gitxsan culture, disrespect will impact the Chiefs' regalia and it will be forever tainted. This is an important lesson for me to remember as I relate Gitxsan worldview to my methodology, that proper respect for Gitxsan knowledge must be ensured while sharing, otherwise it can bring harm to our people, Gitxsan knowledge and way of life. When the highest respect is not guaranteed, Gitxsan knowledge and practices will not be shared.

Dr. Jane Smith, Gitxsan knowledge keeper, language teacher and elder/mentor in our community, speaks to the importance of following our Gitxsan laws and protocols in her book *Returning the feathers: Five Gitxsan stories* (2004). Smith expresses the difference between Adaawk, oral histories owned by and shared within house groups, and ant'imahasxw, stories that can be shared with all Gitxsan to provide guidance for living a good life. Smith explains: "The Adaawk are the personal properties of each house group. Therefore, one cannot write or discuss the Adaawk of another house group. Being ignorant of this puts one at risk of unintentionally breaking the Gitxsan laws" (Smith, 2004, p. 50). These warnings, illustrated by both Smith, here, and the examples from the *Delgamuukw* court case, are helpful for me to determine how and what I share of this project.

Audra Simpson also illustrates this teaching, as she notes the importance of honouring our places within our nations, rather than orienting towards academic institutional expectations; often using us as resources to be mined (2007, 73). In Tłaliłila'ogwa/Sarah Hunt's (2014) work, we see the delicate "dance" of moving between sacred ceremonial spaces and academic colonial spaces, and that negotiating what can and cannot, or should not be translated is a constant concern for Indigenous academics. These warnings show up in Devi Mucina's work as well; Mucina, a Ngoni and Shona scholar, explains that to engage in Indigenous knowledge is "to be

critical of how our relations are political in an interconnected and interdependent world.”

Mucina goes on to explain that “by sharing our social oratures we build collective confidence to engage and challenge each other with respectful curiosity and above all, with love” (Mucina, 2019, p. 4). Mucina also grapples with the tensions of sharing orature in written English, asking “by taking these Ubuntu oratures and putting them into texts using the colonizers’ language of English, am I aiding the colonial project, while voicing Indigenous resurgence?” (2019, p. 3).

Jane Smith similarly discusses these contradictions in her own methodology, informed by Gitksan oral histories and governance systems as well. She expresses the importance of the oral tradition and expresses that all the knowledge and stories she carries come from *the breath of the grandfathers* (Smith, 2004). Yet, in her work, she records oral stories in written form for future generations. This is a tension that is not to be ignored but held in complexity and with diligence. Because of the fractures in knowledge transfer caused by settler colonial brutality, Mucina and Smith argue that writing oratures in English is a risk that may be worth taking to ensure Indigenous knowledges are preserved and passed on in diasporas and within Indigenous homelands. Mucina acknowledges the potential harms of this and shares a beautiful sentiment I carry with my work here: “I hope our ancestors and my relatives will forgive my failing. I hope in the written text using the colonizers’ language the Ubuntu spirit will find us all and guide us all home” (2019, p. 3).

Taking lesson from the Indigenous scholars above, I have drawn on the importance of balancing the sacredness of our teachings with their practical utility to guide my work with NHES. Our stories are meant to be used, to instruct and inform our actions, and they are never static or fixed within our precolonial past. Gitksan laws and way of knowing and being, what I

know and understand of them, guide my ethics and the protocols around my work to the best of my ability. Some of this process will be shared in my scholarship, and some of it will not.

Living and breathing Gitksan worldview, laws, and teachings in practice shape a Gitksan future and the way we see the world and relate with it. Recalled from the opening statement of the chiefs from the Delgamuukw court case, Delgamuukw expresses that for “the Gitksan and Wet’suwet’en, time is not linear, but cyclical. The events of the ‘past’ are not simply history but are something that directly affects the present and the future” (Monet and Skanu’u, 1992, p. 26). Smith (2004) also notes that Gitksan stories connect the listener and the teller to the past, present and future. The knowledge held in the stories applies across time and is held in place. Smith explains: “The Gitksan concept of non-linear time emerges from our worldview of the co-existence of the realms of the physical and supernatural worlds and our belief in reincarnation. In addition, Gitksan stories, laws, songs and language that shape our worldview come from the Breath of the Grandfathers” (2004, Smith, p. 15). Respect for the delicate balance of life, interconnected co-existence moving cyclically, is maintained by Gitksan law. Events are recalled in oral histories through our Adaawk. There are also general stories, *ant’imahlasxw*, which are “the properties of all the Gitksan” and they are used to “instruct, inform, guide and entertain the listeners” (2004, Smith, 50). The stories we tell are important, they create our realities, and they also hold knowledge, values, and law. What stories will inform our futures and how will we tell them?

Gitksan worldview as challenge to settler knowledge production

In Jo-Ann Archibald’s work, *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body and Spirit* (2008) the process of spiritual connection has an integral role in her method.

Archibald also references dreams as a tool in her research journey, dreams show us a way to honour our cyclical worldview. Archibald notes the complexities of working with Indigenous knowledge, elders, and spirit guides (coyote). I am inspired by this work as Archibald does not shy away from spirit as being central to her process, it is celebrated as a critical and honorable pillar of the methodology.

Unlike settler colonial worldviews, Gitksan worldview is grounded in harmony and relationship with unseen spirits, an assumption that we must respect that we know very little of reality, and that we must walk slowly and gently in this world of unpredictability. The trickster WiiG'yet animates this teaching and warns us of what happens when we think we know everything, when we put ourselves at the centre of the universe (Angus, 1977). Archibald also draws on trickster to dance with her in her research of Indigenous Storywork, keeping her on her toes as well.

Trickster often gets into trouble by ignoring cultural rules and practices or by giving sway to the negative aspects of “humanness,” such a vanity, greed, selfishness, and foolishness. Trickster seems to learn lessons the hard way and sometimes not at all. At the same time, Trickster has the ability to do good things for others and is sometimes likes a powerful spiritual being and given much respect (2008, p. 5)

I draw on this concept of trickster for my own methodological process, to deal with the darkness and the uncertainty, to leave room for the unexpected and the absurd, to help me hold what is simultaneously tragic and sacred.

A concept that is helpful in illustrating dis-order in Gitksan worldview can be seen in the idea of Indian Time. This is an Indigenous cultural construct that contradicts settler values and relies on the inevitability that all important work gets done, disregarding minute-by-minute

itineraries to produce all things necessary to sustain life. Of course, adhering to the schedule of the seasons and harvests is necessary, yet being with the place, and taking part in tasks exists outside of capitalist understandings of time that assigns value to time as capital value (Maracle and Kamboureli, 2015). For example, in our Gitxsan Liligyet (Feast), there is a start time, and the strict legal business that is conducted in our house of governance takes place over many hours, in that time all participants' needs are met, and everyone is expected to stay until the business of the host is complete. Current day Liligyet last from mid-day until sunrise the next morning. Everyone knows their role or mirrors those who do, shows up, and the work is followed according to our laws and completed when necessary, with many eyes and hands witnessing and working. As explained in Chapter Two, the Gitxsan worldview honours non-linear time and stories are repeated and are told in circles. This is a challenge to “neurotypical” settler colonial expectations of acceptable knowledge sharing and making.

The English language and settler ontologies cannot reflect or conceptualize a Gitxsan worldview. Therefore, my spiritual and arts-based practices of reflection for this project assist me in expressing experiences and learnings outside of the constraints of the English language, settler ideologies, outside of settler formats that often end up feeling exhausting, redundant, and oppressive. Partially thanks to my neurodivergence, Gitxsan ontology and epistemology easily make sense to me, despite my upbringing with the concept of linear time and settler logics of being. My struggles with details and arbitrary order, with unnecessary rules and conventions, has made writing and research a challenge, but the work I do in community feels natural and joyful, challenging but not painful, frustrating or dehumanizing. Therefore, I am honoured to share some of my art and spiritual processes that have accompanied me on this journey, that has played and danced with me and have allowed me to be my untethered and undefinable self.

Youth and community research

The younger generation and future generations of the Gitxsan need to know who they are and from where they have come. They need to gain the confidence and pride that comes from the knowledge and sense of belonging as a result of knowing one's story. They need to know the legacy of the residential school system that denied them the legacy of the wisdom of the elders.

(Smith, 2004, p. 32)

Gitxsan teachings honour and uplift youth, and youth are treated with respect and agency in their lives according to Gitxsan cultural values. In doing research with Gitxsan youth, co-creation is central to a reciprocal, meaningful and consensual project. In “Ceremonies of Relationship: Engaging Urban Indigenous Youth in Community-Based Research,” (2017) for example, the authors assign “a sacred character to knowledge generation” which acknowledges the precarity and deep responsibility we have as researchers to honour and respect youth and our communities (Bird-Naytowhow, Hatakla, Pearl, Judge and Sjoblom, 2017, p. 3). The sacredness of knowledge generation for me is the web of relations which must inform the work I do, and the responsibility to honour Gitxsan laws and protocols as I do this work. Co-research is imperative to research relationships with Indigenous youth and communities. Bird-Naytowhow et al. (2017) express that co-research must be central “since we know from previous research that meaningful engagement with youth can increase the scope, significance, and applicability of research findings” (p. 4). Relationships must extend beyond the research process and safety and care must remain central.

In doing research with the students at NHES, I kept the question of how I can do research while allowing the experience with the students to be the “outcome” at the forefront of my

process. Meaning, rather than having a goal for knowledge production, the process and experience could belong to the students and be the knowledge produced, obscuring the opportunity to extract intimate and sovereign community knowledge. A Gitksan worldview informed the relationship with the students allowing for the co-research to be generative and reciprocal. Akin to how Bird-Naytowhow et. al. illustrate how Indigenous ontological approaches are oriented toward relationship, this research process inherently contrasts settler colonial objectivity. Not present in their article is an effort to name and analyze settler colonialism which fails their co-researchers and an opportunity to work towards futures untethered from settler colonial violence.

Katie Johnson-Goodstar's article, "Indigenous youth participatory action research: Re-visioning social justice for social work with Indigenous youths," (2013) explains that Indigenous informed social justice in the field of Child and Youth Care must support the needs of Indigenous youth facing settler colonial dispossession. Contributing to the discussion presented by Bird-Naytowhow et. al. (2017) above, Johnson-Goodstar adds a social justice lens to her research with youth. They describe the need for Indigenous children and youth to be equipped with knowledge and power from Indigenous teachings of what it means to be a warrior. However, Johnson-Goodstar explains that this type of "warrior" training is not meant to inspire an essentialized masculine idea of a warrior, but to illustrate that,

Warriors who are 'deeply committed to the resurgence and regeneration of Indigenous peoples' cultural integrity through reconnecting with their sources of strength, which includes their traditional territories, spirituality, cultures, and languages and each other' supporting the development and engagement of new Indigenous warriors can promote the 'processes of transformation' (Johnson-Goodstar, 2013, p. 317).

This idea of warriorism is meant to encourage Indigenous youth to be empowered in who they are and their own governance and kinship teachings and practices that give strength to spirit.

My methodology has been inspired by Johnson-Goodstar's (2013) assertion that social justice practices and knowledge about settler colonial systems and structures, along with Indigenous knowledge and teachings, provide Indigenous children and youth the tools and language to express their lived realities and refusals. Allowing for narratives of resistance and giving space for possibilities outside of settler colonial problems is central in providing youth alternative imaginary's for themselves and their futures. This concept is effectively defined by Sandrina Carere (de Finney) in her work with Indigenous youth and colonial gender-based violence (2017). Carere simultaneously explores settler colonial gender-based violence, and Indigenous girls' felt-dignity and self-determination, while also rejecting "limited, overly Eurocentric psycho-social notions of resilience" (Carere, 2017, p. 10).

Adding this lens to research with youth enables the naming of genocidal settler colonial logics, resisting the pathologizing of Indigenous youth and community, removing the "problem" from within Indigenous people, and placing the "problem" within settler colonial mechanisms. This is notable as research with youth without centering meaningful agency, dignity, and self-determination risks a mis-categorization, erasure, and harmful assumptions of who and what they are, undermining their authority. In response, anti-colonial and dignified approaches offers potential to promote Indigenous children and youth self-actualization and support Indigenous youth-led resistance to ongoing settler colonialism.

Gendered lens and analysis

Culturally safe care means care that recognizes more than two genders.

Hunt, 2018, 26

The near-total erasure of Two-Spirit and trans people that was accomplished through the imposition of the gender binary is integrally related to the hierarchy that continues to perpetuate the violent marginalization of Indigenous girls and women.

Hunt, 2018, p.

36

Tłalilila'ogwa/Sarah Hunt examines “the erasure of trans and Two-Spirit people as an ongoing form of settler colonial violence that is being perpetuated through current conceptualizations of gender as a social determinant of health for Indigenous communities” in the article, “Embodying Self-Determination: Beyond the Gender Binary” (2018, p. 27). Hunt illustrates how the erasure of queer, 2spirit, and trans youth perpetuates ongoing colonial violence through marginalization and the exclusion of queer and trans youth within neoliberal wellness and healing programs. In this analysis, Hunt outlines how settler colonialism relies on gender-based violence to erase Indigenous peoples from their lands:

Although much work has been done to address structurally enforced inequality for status and non-status Indian women, the same has not been done for trans Indigenous peoples, and without a way to capture their experiences, the consequences of this erasure are difficult to comprehend... Gender, then, plays a central role in understanding and defining who we are as Indigenous peoples, and the forced disappearance of locally defined systems of gender is central to the settler project of Native disappearance (2018, 25).

It is necessary to consider gender-based violence as a central facet of settler colonial violence, as colonially imposed logics of patriarchy, homophobia and misogyny continue to enforce the pervasive genocidal attack on women, genderqueer and trans people in our communities. Not only is this a site of intervention we must make to ensure the safety of our kin and our futures, but it is also critical to understand that this attack is intentional because of the power women, queer, trans and 2 spirit people hold in our collective liberation; queerness and transness are a direct threat to hetero-settler colonial futures. While working with youth, a gendered lens allows for the opportunity to use language and approaches that work against the erasure of queerness in our communities, which can contribute to truly liberated futures. It counters the erasure of 2spirit, queer and trans folks who, as Hunt explains, are continuously disappeared by settler colonialism, not only by our oppressors but within our own communities. Hunt insists that having a “gender-based analysis is necessary for understanding and addressing social health determinants for Indigenous peoples across diverse gender identities and expressions” (2018, 28).

Carere’s healing work with Indigenous youth names the gender-based violence of settler colonialism and insists that the responsibility of holding the burden of that violence does not fall onto Indigenous girls. By rejecting the concept of “resilience” Carare denies the narrative that Indigenous girls must accept the violence which Canada perpetuates against them. Using the critical lens of settler colonialism to remove the burden of colonial violence from Indigenous bodies, Carere gives space to illuminate Indigenous girls’ resistance, body sovereignty, and relational kinship power that is ever present in Indigenous communities. This approach offers a hybrid of theories on methodology I wish to address by ensuring that pathologizing terms and rhetoric do not become felt and that we do not promote trauma narratives in our workshops

which include all genders. As Carere demonstrates here, it is possible to both talk about the real and sheer brutality of settler colonialism and to resist the problem of that violence being placed within Indigenous bodies and communities. By uplifting Indigenous girls', queer and 2spirit youths' autonomy, resistance, self-determination, and body sovereignty, as Carere has here, we are able to discuss topics of settler colonial violence without furthering the states goals of pathologizing and victimizing Indigenous youth (de Finney, 2017, 18).

Considering the importance of queer and gender analysis, in our work at NHES, there were a few considerations we took in our organizing of the project and in the process of the research with the students. We met everyone we were working with where they are at, used gender inclusive language, and carried ourselves gently in a way that invited diverse gender expressions and language. We did this by using gender-neutral pronouns, both with those we interacted with and between Morgan and myself (we use both they/them and she/her pronouns), we did not assume the staff or students' pronouns, and we did our best to produce an environment where students felt safe to be themselves. The way that we worked, following Gitxsan kinship values and protocols, having a team that was all Gitxsan women, and our liberatory approach to the workshops and engagement with the youth was queer at its core.

The work we do as Gitxsan women and queer folks is queer in that it is the antithesis to capitalist systems and values which are steeped in patriarchy and heteronormativity (Byrd, 2020; Hunt and Holmes, 2015). It is reflective of the felt methodology that challenges individualize and neoliberal notions of healing, wellness and being. And, in challenging our own conditioning of heteronormative and patriarchal values it allows for us to create environments that are queer and introduce opportunities for moments of interaction that are outside of patriarchy's values of dominance and erasure. Asking the students what feels safe, how do they know when they are

feeling safe, comfortable, cleansed, and grounded are questions that invite expansion from reductive and gendered categories of how we express ourselves and our inner knowing's. As gender and sexuality remain sites of settler colonial violence on Indigenous bodies, especially for those who are not hetero-cisgendered men, speaking to and connecting with our bodies' knowledge can interfere with the dehumanization of our bodies and the non-consensual dominance that is often forced upon us (Hansen, 2020; Hunt and Holmes, 2015; Pyle, 2020; Tallbear, 2019).

As noted in previous chapters, Kinship Rising's research focuses on the resistance and well-being of Indigenous youth by promoting cultural knowledge and kinship and land-based connections while acknowledging the ongoing violence of colonialism. Anna Chadwick's research (2019) was part of the Kinship Rising project and was guided by the principles and values laid out by Carere (published as de Finney) above, focused on BIPOC youth and gender-based violence. In Chadwick's research (2019) in small rural Indigenous communities where issues of confidentiality were significant concerns shared by youth participants, she refrained from asking youth direct questions about their personal experiences with gender-based violence; instead, she engaged with art-based and land-based methods to work with youth to cultivate empowerment from within and remove assumptions about predetermined outcomes to give space for the youth to determine what was most important to them.

The interview questions Chadwick asked included: "What do girls and young women need to talk about in regard to sexualized violence? Who are important supports in your community? How do you connect to culture? What do girls and young women need to address the silencing that surrounds sexualized violence? What objects from the land do you connect to?" (Chadwick, 2019, p. 28). These questions illustrate the practice of naming the gendered

violence, giving space for the youth to interpret and imagine their own strength and resistance, and care for their agency and autonomy. Furthermore, in this work, Chadwick felt an ethics of refusal, meaning she refused to reproduce or publish traumatic stories “revealing details of violence that might reproduce stereotypes of marginalized Indigenous youth” (Chadwick, 2019, p. 52). Chadwick’s research and strengthening work with Indigenous youth is an example of how we can do research that alleviates the harms of gendered settler colonial and white supremacist brutality. Through the acknowledgement of genocidal settler systems and structures that brutalize children and youth, and simultaneous focus on strength, resistance and empowerment, refusing pathology and victimry, Chadwick employs a liberatory framework. These approaches inform my research with youth in terms of facilitating workshops that focused on promoting safety and youth-directed content and centered their vision for wellness, self-expression, and thriving communities and identities. My work with Indigenous youth is feminist and queer through a felt liberatory approach. It is my contribution to create spaces for us to feel, to connect with our humanity, both of which are threatening to settler regimes. This connection can allow for a direct refusal of misogyny, patriarchy, homophobia, transphobia, and all the facets of gender-based colonial violence that hold back our movements towards freedom (Belcourt, 2016; Maracle, 1988).

Land Based Healing

Gitksan worldview insists on the connection between ourselves as humans, the non-human world, the land, plants, animals, water and the spirit world. This interconnection helps me understand the importance of centering relationship with each other, place and spirit. According to Gitksan worldview, law and governance are inherently linked to identity, place and wellness.

Therefore, without specific cultural knowledge and protocols, being in place can contribute to the erasure of Gitxsan laws and protocols that have been in place since time immemorial to keep people healthy and safe on our territories. Our law and governance protocols are then integral to Gitxsan wellness.

Land-based healing and wellness program's continued popularization has not been met with a critical analysis attending to the threat of cooptation by neoliberal reconciliatory state discourses. Danto, Walsh, and Sommerfeld (2020) explore current land-based healing programs in their article, "Learning from Those Who Do: Land-Based Healing in a Mushkegowuk Community". Their survey of land-based healing approaches in different communities within Mushkegowuk territory used a "two-eye seeing" approach, where the researcher uses the strengths of both Indigenous and colonial knowledges to engage in research. Although this research is helpful in the ways that we see land-based healing taken up in community, the researchers do not express their relationship to the work, including how they are in relationship with this place and its laws. Furthermore, they do not attend to the harms of settler colonial knowledge production and how it is antithetical to use settler approaches to create any sort of anti-colonial knowledge. Expressing our social location and relationship to the work we are doing is a necessary step to engage ethical and liberatory research. Placing ourselves in our work resists the settler colonial belief in objectivity, which has and continues to be used as a tool to subjugate and oppress Indigenous subjects of research (Tallbear, 2013).

Danto et al. follow Maggie Kovach's guidelines for Indigenous research methodologies, which they declare are different from settler colonial methods of research and data collection because colonial methods "involve individual stories, which are condensed and checked by the storyteller, that the researcher reflects upon to find meaning" (Danto et al., 2020, 2137). This

prescription does not necessarily align with the depth of relationship and responsibility that anti-colonial and liberatory scholars have called for (Million, 2013; Tuck and Yang, 2012). Also, since these researchers do not place themselves in this research at all, in this definition of Indigenous research methods, the researcher is still separate from their practice and research subject. This shows the ways that land-based healing can be severed from the Indigenous political order that is necessary for land-based healing to be meaningful and connected to liberation for Indigenous people. Therefore, it is important to note the limitations to land-based healing and the ways that these concepts are very quickly coopted by settler colonialism to be stripped of their power, meaning and potential.

Another example of depoliticized land-based healing work is witnessed in Redvers' article "'The land is a healer': Perspectives on land-based healing from Indigenous practitioners in northern Canada" (2020). This article contributes to the field of land-based healing, while also showing how without a clear analysis of settler colonialism, land-based healing can be too easily diluted and tokenised rather than serving as a healing tool from systemic colonial violence that is inherently political. If land-based healing is divorced from Indigenous law and governance, as seen in Redvers' work, it can be taken up as a neoliberal reconciliatory practice, while supporting ongoing settler colonialism to prevail unnamed. Redvers gives a definition of land-based healing which includes being in a place that is "urban nature-based, rural, or remote location, on a land base that has been spiritually cultivated, honoured, and respected" (Redvers, 2020, p. 90). They go on to explain that steps must be taken to "identify how an individual or community's relation with the land, self, and others has been disrupted and how best to help renew this relationship" (Redvers, 2020, p. 90). There is not an acknowledgment and syncing of the connection between the ongoing need for wellness and the ongoing settler colonial and

gender-based violence that is inflicted on Indigenous lands and bodies. Like Danto et. al., the definition of land-based healing is prescriptive and has the risk of being taken out of a political context which is essential for meaningful healing and connection. She explains that:

The term “land-based” was described as a reminder of humanity’s fundamental and inherent connection with the natural world and was agreed upon as a common English term across all regions for cross-cultural dialogue. This was after an acknowledgement of the diverse terminology describing land in each traditional language. This culturally-infused term differentiated the concept from colonial-based conceptions of nature which were seen to approach humans and the land as separate entities” (Redvers, 2020, 95).

Their definition of land-based healing assumes that being on and with the land is inherently decolonial, that it is in contradiction to settler colonial ways of knowing and being. This false statement promotes ongoing settler colonial brutality on our lands and bodies by undermining the laws and governance of place and territory.

Furthermore, without naming the violence of settler colonialism, the onus of fixing the “problem” is placed within Indigenous bodies, rather than the system and structures of violence themselves. This leads to pathologizing, and further violence and erasure. One helpful aspect of Rever’s (2020) article were the reflections from the participants who are land-based practitioners in northern Canada; they explained the significance of land-based healing for Indigenous folks recovering from trauma, addictions, and other mental health struggles. The research showed that cultural knowledge was integral to the land-based healing programs as well.

As seen in the literature above, land-based healing is at risk of becoming a coopted phrase which is placed on top of normative (settler colonial in nature) healing methods. In the way that land-based healing has been neatly packaged into this definition, we can see how it

could become a prescription rather than an felt, relational, and deeply intimate community practice. Also troubling is that this prescription of land-based healing does not have Indigenous bodies and communities at its centre, becoming another coopted framework of settler colonialism. As noted in my exploration of Gitxsan knowledge and methodologies, and the ethics applied to the Gwalxyee'ensst mural project, land-based is not something you can extract from a complex net of relationship to kin, Pdeek, Wilp, spirit, and law. Without these dimensions considered, land-based healing will become another coopted settler colonial mental health tool. Yet, there are examples of land-based healing which do honour the relationship between Nation, community, and laws and governance of territory. The admission of Nation-specific laws and protocols in land-based healing work threatens the political and legal jurisdiction of Indigenous Nations, reducing our governance practices to cultural entities that can be removed form contexts and their legal power.

In Johnson-Jennings et. al.'s work, they explore the Houma Tribes' efforts to reconnect their members to land, history and cultural knowledge as a means of healing collectively. The Houma tribe co-created a land-based healing curriculum which included a seven day walk following their origin story. As the curriculum was created, "they identified historical accounts of Houma women leading their community to safety and ancestors suffering unbearable struggles to ensure the survival of future generations" (Johnson-Jennings, 2020, p. 7). The act of remembering and connecting to ancestors' strength became central to the land-based healing for their Nation.

Similar to Carere's framework which insists on naming and revealing settler colonialism and its ever-present nuances, Johnson-Jenning's work describes how settler colonial violence has severed Indigenous people from their lands via many forms of settler colonial genocide (2020).

Furthermore, they explain that settler colonialism is a social determinant of health, placing the onus of the “problem’ on settler colonialism, not the Indigenous individual. They explain the importance of connecting collectivity, tribal knowledge and culture to land-based healing:

These threads of knowledge are engaged and ancient teachings (aka Original Instructions) are revitalized and regenerated in Indigenous community practices, Indigenous thriving is activated, and Indigenous community wellbeing is actuated. It is from this thriving perspective that we contextualize the present land-based healing study development, methods, and findings.” (Johnson-Jennings et. al., 2020, p. 2)

The acknowledgment of original instructions, laws and protocols for Houma territories, governed by Houma ancient laws, aligns with the Gitksan understanding of how to be in place and how land-based healing can hold meaning. The focus on the specific tribe and their ancestral, cultural, spiritual protocols of being on their territory which promotes a therapeutic experience and healing for individuals and communities, is in contrast to the general and detached theories on land-based healing noted above. In their study, Johnson-Jennings et. al. speak of the settler colonial violence to the land being directly connected to violence on the Houma, specially causing health issues in the community, including psychological harm:

For instance, UHN has endured land trauma via oil rig drilling, dam construction, and dredging swamplands, which have contaminated their seafood and environment. Between 2010 and 2015, 35% of all UHN citizens reported that they continue to be negatively affected, especially in terms of health and wellbeing, by the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill (UHN 2015). (Johnson-Jennings, 2020, p. 3)

The authors explain the relationship with place as “interconnectedness deeply reflecting spirituality and cultural cosmology tied to place” (2020, p. 5), which shows the depth of

relationship, responsibility, and unending connection to place reaching backwards and forwards in time. Therefore, from the Houma perspective, as illustrated here:

Given this familial relationship, Indigenous individuals consider the land as co-contributing to their meaning of place and influencing their healing journey. Land then serves as an active agent in healing, provides a culturally appropriate location to conduct healing (Johnson-Jennings, 2020, p. 4).

Participants in this curriculum expressed the power of connecting to specific sites of resistance and power, along with the site that hold historical violence. The participants had the opportunity to connect to the legacy of strength and resistance of their ancestors and imagine what kind of ancestors they wanted to be. Honouring this type of relationship, the delicacy of it, and sacredness of it, its web of kinship, is central to doing land-based healing. In this way, land becomes an agent in the healing process, and in the relationship, the land begins to heal from the settler colonial violence it holds as well.

Towards an ethical and political land-based wellness project, I look to the article, “Indigenous Land-Based Healing Pedagogies from the Ground Up” (2021). Nicholas Claxton uses a story that connects to a specific place, explaining the importance of spiritual places for land-based teaching and healing. Claxton (2021) illustrates the importance of specific cultural knowledge, and the importance of not generalizing land-based healing which can further colonialism by erasing nations cultural and legal ties to land and place. Similar to Johnson-Jennings and Smith, Claxton uses his traditional knowledge to connect youth to place, their culture and community, promoting healing through learning who they are and where they come from, along with the therapeutic nature of engaging with the land and place. Claxton acknowledges the interconnectedness of healing, community, lands and waters. He explains:

“therapeutic practice with Indigenous peoples is incomplete without Indigenous knowledge and access to, and intimate relationship with the land. For clarity, I speak of ‘land’ as inclusive of all elements of our homelands (water, air, forest, mountains, plant, and animal life, etc.)” (2021, p. 56). Claxton also ties in the health and future of Indigenous Nations to the healing with Indigenous youth “within their Indigenous philosophies, laws, and beliefs” (Claxton, 2021, p. 56). Countering the generalization of land-based healing, Claxton insists on the importance of specific places and re-connecting to those spaces, and how that is central to healing within Indigenous communities:

While all lands are sacred, Indigenous communities and nations will always have a number of culturally significant places, like certain mountains, rivers, or village sites.

There will also be land-based stories, language, and meaning that is connected to those places. All life, such as the plants, animals, and inanimate which occur naturally in those locations, could also have cultural and spiritual significance. When the land, life, people, story, and spirituality are reconnected and restored in the way that it was intended and gifted by the creator, that is land-based healing for Indigenous resurgence. (Claxton, 2021, p. 58)

Drawing from these Indigenous teachings of land-based research, youth work, and healing pedagogies, our Gitxsan project center’s the importance of protocols, laws and ways of knowing and being as inseparable from place-based healing.

The work we did with the students and faculty at NHES did not take place “on the land” as it has been conceptualized and understood today. The work took place on Wilps Nikateen territory, under the watchful Stegyoden (the mountain that stands watch over Gitxsan territory). We were in the classroom, but we were on Gitxsan Laxyip. The teachings of the land were with

us in place. We also engaged with medicines that are the land, but they came from other territories. We discussed what this meant in the workshop. Using medicines collected from other places reflects my displacement and my connections, of who I am and my relationships – marking my mobility, limits, and gifts. This was honoured through telling the stories of the medicines and inciting the students into relationship with the medicines and where they came from. Furthermore, “land” has come conceptualized as an extension of the Native, the Native which has been created on the premise of masculinist and misogynistic notions of relation, resistance and world building within the fields of Indigenous Resurgence and Nation studies (Belcourt, 2016). This causes me to pause and consider how we see land, and how we relate to it through the lens of gender. The land being conceptualized as outside of the Native, to be protected and engaged with for cultural purposes, something that is “out there” reinforces otherness and disconnection from relationship with place that is ever-present. The notion that the land is something we visit or protect that is outside of ourselves, that is not inherently us, always connected in spirit, reaffirms patriarchal values that enable ownership, power-over and disconnection.

As I explore in the following section, art and place have always been deeply and inextricably interconnected within Gitksan people and communities, which is why it was crucial for our project to include art process as a method to recenter Gitksan youth’s world making. Arts-based processes can allow for us to communicate in another form of language and can allow for powerful sites of knowledge exchange to occur among diverse communities.

Arts-Based Process

Art or creative strategy is acknowledging one’s own participation in replacing the

systems we fight with new ones. It is the belief that beauty has the capacity to transform and heal, and that we all have the ability to create beauty. It implies that the inner work that we do leads to outer revolution.

Shiv-Suleman and Esapzai, 2017, p.

20

Knowledge production is political. Who decides which knowledge is produced and what knowledge is prioritized comes from those who hold power (Dion Fletcher & Ferguson, 2021; Tallbear, 2013). Therefore, the dominant language and framework we abide by to produce knowledge is inherently political. Indigenous people produce knowledge and reaffirm law and governance through art and metaphor and continue to advocate for cultural art forms (song, dance, carving, paintings, story, etc.) to be acknowledged by the state as markers of our sovereignty (Dion Fletcher & Ferguson, 2021; Monet and Skanu'u, 1992). Art, metaphor, and spiritual expressions can become challenges to settler colonial discourse when upheld by Indigenous thinkers and creators. Art processes, both political and relational, can serve to enrich a world outside of settler colonial ontology and epistemology.

If we hope to build new worlds with our work, we need to be able to engage with “Other” modalities to share our ideas, reflections and desires. I need artistic processes to be a part of my learning and my reflection as a non-linear learner. Therefore, exploring my feelings and thoughts as I engage with materials, colours, and textures, allows me to come into relation with my work in a way that honours its (and my own) complexity and multitudes. Art and spiritual processes allow for me as a researcher, among other roles, to express feelings, experiences and reflections in a way that fosters presence and honours my own liminality.

What can dis-organization offer and obscure?

Connection to place, non-human beings, water and spirit can be facilitated with artistic practices that allow for creativity, visceral expression, and other-than-verbal communication. For example, Shilo Shiv Suleman (2017) explains that suspending disbelief can foster moments of relief from our current reality and give us space to imagine worlds beyond present settler colonial constraints. Artistic processes can allow us to move beyond the categories that colonial structures violently impose upon us. Through art and community work in the Fearless Collective, Shiv-Suleman uses ritual and artistic practice with communities contesting with historical and ongoing oppression. The Fearless methodology uses catharsis and transmutation to move from a place of fear, or lack, to a place of abundance and safety through ritual, felt visualization (imagination), storytelling, and arts-based practices. Shiv Suleman explains: “Fear becomes a system of its own. It dictates our decisions, behaviours, and trails of thoughts. Fear forms a web of judgements, insecurities, and otherness” (Shiv-Suleman & Esapzai, 2017, 19). This fear becomes felt and can control relationship within ourselves, our communities and the world as a whole. With a feminist lens, Shiv-Suleman’s work reclaims histories, present, and futures:

In our feminist movements, suspension of disbelief allows us to say: ‘I will not always have to fight for my rights; people who do not share my beliefs are not my adversaries/enemies; the colour of my skin will not always colour my experiences of the world; my struggle will not leave me bitter and resentful; I do not have to go to the best college to be able to find good work; my unpaid labour will not go unaccounted for’ (Shiv-Suleman, 2018, 19).

The Fearless Collective asks a number of questions which inform how they build their utopian feminist world while suspending the participants’ disbelief in order to imagine futures

outside of fear and imposed colonial and gender-based violence: “what makes us feel safe?...In our villages, how will power be manifested? What do we consider precious? Where are our libraries...What is family? ...What do marriage, kinship, inheritance and social security look like? And if we have to thrive, together, in our village what will work look like? How are we compensated for it? What does our currency of exchange look like? What is considered precious? How does it define our relationship to earth? In our village, what is a family?” (Shiv Shuelman, 2021). These questions inspire approaches to research and community work that call into question our assumptions and allow us to unpack what we carry in order to access our desires for the worlds we want to build.

Expanding on non-linear and queer approaches to our work, the field of disability studies shows that neurodiversity can be understood as a challenge to settler colonial capitalist values that define our human worth by our ability to produce, think linearly and obey orders and hierarchy. People who are neurodiverse, whether that diagnosis is autism, ADHD, learning disabilities, etc. become a challenge to settler colonial values of linear thinking and knowing, order, and hyper production (Meekosha, 2011; Perry, 2015). Artistic and spiritual connection and exploration - taking up story, metaphor, materials, colours, bodily experiences and expressions, dreams, etc. - can allow opportunity for neurodiverse minds to express process, ideas, knowledge that exist outside of settler colonial processes of linear thinking, objective truths, rigid structures and rules of writing, ordered frameworks (to name a few), and in turn can also obstruct settler colonial academic expectations.

The idea that there is a “forced” disability by settler colonialism on Indigenous subjects, and as a result, the mythology of Indigenous people as pathologically unwell or damaged, is important to note within the field of disability studies as well (Savarese, 2010). The deliberate

production of disability via physical and psychological harm (both tenants of genocide) reaffirms via settler colonial beliefs that the Native or Other is inherently damaged and unable to govern themselves (Million, 2013). My art practice, my neurodivergence, my spiritual connection/expressions, my ramblings and my attempt (struggle) to share this story (my research) is an obstruction to pathologizing colonial disablement. Those who hold me up, support me, edit for me, affirm me, and guide me (both human and non-human) are a web of love that exists among and beyond ongoing colonial harm and disablement. My ability to work, express, be held and loved in my dis-order is a refusal of the categorically marginalization of neurodiverse people from certain colonial spheres, including academia.

Art, mobilized with a critical queer, feminist and liberatory lens allows us to create worlds that feel otherwise impossible within the confines of dominate global systems and structures of violence and oppression. Artistic processes can also act as a language to communicate feelings and experiences that are not safe to be shared explicitly through written or spoken word. Illustrating this point, Anna Chadwick (2019) uses arts-based methods in her work on colonial gender-based violence with Indigenous youth to create containers of comfort to explore otherwise hard topics. She uses “photography, narratives, art and installations to take action in ways that unsettle and (re)center how stories of violence are heard and circulated” (Chadwick, 2019, p. 101).

Chadwick explains that using arts-based practices and discussing settler colonial gender-based violence fosters catharsis, similar to how Shiv-Suleman explains her methodology, and also allows for an ethical witnessing to sacred stories shared by Indigenous youth. She explains: “My narrative field notes and art pieces, presented in this article, engage my desire to witness in a way that demands an ethical response to colonial violence that opens up the possibility for

safer conditions in which Indigenous girls can be heard” (Chadwick, 2019, p. 101). In her work with Indigenous youth, Chadwick claims her methodology was “deliberately co-created and emergent” which allowed her to stay aligned with her “ethic of refusal so as to incorporate values of evolving consent and respect for participants and local protocols” (Chadwick, 2019, p. 103).

Chadwick aligns land-based and arts-based methods to create opportunities for Indigenous youth to express their resistance and hope for a future free of gender-based violence that can be witnessed in a way that feels safe enough. Chadwick explains that in her work, she has witnessed “the significant creativity and will of communities and youth of all genders. I see that they and the generations before them have always enacted resistance alongside violence” (2019, p. 109).

Conclusion

Here, I have explored the possibility of drawing from a Gitksan worldview to inform a critical felt methodology, and how place-based and arts-based practices can work with and amplify such a methodology. Gitksan worldview and my experience of it is the foundation for my critical felt methodology. The laws and protocols of engagement that come from a Gitksan worldview help me do ethical and responsible research and allow me to refuse settler colonial containment and demands for cooptation and assimilation. This Gitksan methodology also informs place-based and arts-based methods, in that the laws and protocols can guide the process of being on and with place and partaking in creative methods of remembering and experiencing. Each of these ideas explored above inform my research model and the workshops we did with Gitksan youth. As in Chadwick’s research, I witnessed how in our project, arts-based methods were used to bring creativity and imaginings to felt process, a language that is not confined by a

settler colonial worldview. We created together, and like Chadwick, we had open-ended questions which were connected to material practice - medicine bundle making, visual art making, which gives space and autonomy to the youth involved. We used language and themes for the workshops to reflect anti-trauma narratives: we asked, what keeps you grounded, cleansed, protected? These questions acknowledge the world of hardship yet insist on Gitksan strength and authority, and our connection to spirit and place and our knowledges - and allow for the youth to determine their experiences and what those things mean to each of them.

Chapter Two

Therapeutic Discourses: Pathways of healing and resistance with Indigenous youth

Why in the presence of so much self-determination do we internationally experience an accelerated amount of death, destruction of life and life forms?

Million, 2013, p. 149

It Is not surprising that the reconciliation that indigenes are called on to trust as acts of justice do not actually stop the removal of Indigenous children from their families or stop the brutality against Indigenous women, or stop the social welfare interventions and criminalization that are endemic to indigenous peoples and nations. Our imaginary for progressive moments is strained constantly by the ways in which the languages of victim and justice are fluidly mobilised by different political agendas.

Million, 2013, p. 23

In this chapter, I discuss the term *healing* in relation to Indigenous youth, communities and Nations and query how this term implicates my research and work in community. I bring forward a critical analysis of the term healing, with support from several Indigenous scholars, and use this lens to explore scholarship and research on Indigenous healing practices, methods and programs. My research focuses on Indigenous youth liberation and wellness, therefore, understanding the current political and cultural landscape is central as I continue my research and my community work.

Settler colonial violence undisputedly persists in Canada and scholars stress that settler-colonial tactics of coercion operate to control and manipulate Indigenous subjects via policies of

assimilation (Mowatt, 2023; Walia, 2021; Woolford et. al, 2014). Scholar Glen Coulthard (2014) calls the ongoing project of violent assimilation, recognition politics. Coulthard suggests that the primary contemporary mode of settler colonialism in Canada is the coercion of Indigenous Nations into compliance by manipulating them to relinquish political authority to govern their territories through modern treaty agreements and corporate partnerships with the state (Coulthard, 2014). In turn, the state offers some variant of recognition of Indigenous rights and title. Although Coulthard's argument is widely recognized in the field, it has been critiqued by feminist scholar Tłaliłila'ogwa/Sarah Hunt due to the exclusion of gender-based analysis. Hunt expresses that the violence of colonialism, particularly intimate gendered and sexual-based violence, is at risk of being erased via a macro state-nation analysis of colonial violence (Hunt, 2015). The intimacies of everyday colonialism, such as within the home, family dynamics, and particularly in everyday gendered brutality, are the center of the settler colonial project and are due for our attention.

Coulthard's framing of recognition politics as a concept, if it were to consider the hard violence of gender-based attacks as political, could help us understand the ways in which both macro levels of "soft" violence and micro levels "hard" violence both exist in shaping settler futures and destroying our kinship and governance systems (Hunt, 2015). Further, recognition politics can be used as a framework to understand the post-TRC pathology of the Indigenous trauma victim. This pathology renders Indigenous people incompetent, therefore unable to self-govern, establishing becoming healed as a prerequisite to self-determination (Million, 2013).

Scholar Dian Million draws on Foucault's theory of biopolitics to critique and help us understand the Canadian government's recent focus on Indigenous healing as a precondition to self-determination. This critique has become central to framing my research with youth and

community. Million explains that “Michel Foucault first posed that western nations moved to develop styles of governing to produce certain lives rather than repressing “life generally” (Million, 2013, p. 140). Although, as mentioned above, Canada inflicts sheer physical violence and a quality of life that is unliveable, conceptualized as necropolitics, (i.e. militarized raids, murders at residential schools and gender-based violence) the state also uses biopower to “produce certain life” via policy and discourse. Built on by post-colonial scholars, biopolitical power is a framework to understand the often-invisible settler colonial mechanisms that control and create certain life via the power-over-relationship between the state and Indigenous people via normative state functions (Fanon, 1953; Said, 1979). Biopolitics is how the state uses its power to manage, control and subjugate bodies and create certain lives through social mechanisms. Necropolitics is an extension of biopolitics in where the state creates conditions that produce death. Million draws on the affect of biopolitics and situates our current political climate as a political relationship between a victim, Indigenous people, and perpetrator, the nation-state (Million, 2013; Mbembe, 2019). This relationship calls for a moral reconciliation, where the victim is forced into a state of perpetual healing, and the state is morally redeemed, and relied on, entrenching biopolitical mechanisms (Million, 2013). Million points out that this affectual impact is challenged through the felt resistance of Indigenous feminism.

We can use a biopolitical understanding of Canada-Indigenous relations to analyze the rise in healing discourses, most prominently seen through the 2008 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). When Indigenous survivors of Indian Residential Schools (IRS) began to take schools, administrators, and faculty to court for the crimes inflicted on them as children at IRS institutions, Canada eventually responded by creating the TRC to address the issue. In the collection “Power through Testimony: Reframing Residential Schools in the Age of

Reconciliation” illustrates that the lawsuits based on victims' testimonies leading up to the implementation of the IRSSA (Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement) were an attempt by Canada to keep survivors out of the courtroom (Vanthuyne and Capitaine, 2017). The goal of the TRC was to provide an opportunity for IRS survivors to tell their stories and to have the dark past of Canada witnessed by Canadians. The TRC also came out with 94 calls to action, for all Canadians, private and public sectors to adopt into their practices to ensure that reconciliation is put into movement (2017). These recommendations cannot be legally enforced, and although the act of telling a story that has been silenced and erased for decades is no doubt powerful, the Canadian state has placed accountability for solutions to the grievances of Indigenous people onto their bodies and communities, rather than on Canada, the state and the church who inflicted their brutality. A central and often overlooked mechanism of the TRC was the broader context of the IRS settlement agreement. The TRC settlement agreement was the financial compensation to IRS survivors which bound them in a contract which legally prohibited them from taking their perpetrators court or to take any legal action against them. This allows the TRC to place all onus on the victims to heal, rather than enforcing accountability or acknowledgment of the violence of the perpetrators. When we follow this logic, we find it merely strengthens the foundation of settler colonial Canada – violence against Indigenous children, families, men, women, queer, trans and 2spirit communities, and all living beings, legalized through discourses that decriminalize perpetrators of violence and death (2017). Julia Hughes illustrates this point in her chapter, “The New Victim” from the collection *Power Through Testimony: Reframing Residential Schools in the Age of Reconciliation*:

... the TRC responded to the difficulty of its limited legal powers by casting individual employees of the residential school system not as perpetrators but as a

different class of victims and by casting institutional defendants not as perpetrator organizations but as cosponsors of the TRC... However, it arguably altered the content of their contributions by selectively producing victim narratives and by narrowing the conceptual gaps between victims and perpetrators. (2017, p. 4)

The creation of the pathologized trauma victim, and subsequently, healing as the necessary step towards Indigenous self-determination becomes the new plight of the Indian. In Canada, within the emergence of pervasive healing programming, we witness a discourse which has lent itself to the ongoing attempt to diminish and destroy Indigeneity and pathways to liberation.

Similar to the IRS project, which cast Indigenous children as barbaric and in need of saving, the casting of the Indigenous trauma victim fills the role as the new “Indian Problem” (Million, 2013). To categorize the Indigenous subject as a trauma victim, pathologized into a constant state of victimry, Indigenous peoples have been given one pathway forward to self-determination: heal the trauma out of their bodies, communities, and Nations. Million claims that this tactic undermines and diminishes Indigenous governance, laws, and relationship to place which enacts governance and law – and subsequently Indigenous futures (Million, 2013).

Furthermore, the neoliberal, cis-hetero settler colonial model of healing continues to create an Indigenous subject that can be claimed, and that is legible to the settler state – it creates a subject that is stripped of its humanity via gender-based violence and biopolitical power. Thus, moves toward and reliance on state circumscribed healing and wellness modalities are a form of recognition politics (Coulthard, 2014; Hunt, 2015). Therefore, healing and wellness in a settler colonial state is deeply neoliberal, individualized, evidenced by frameworks individual wellness paradigms void of collective political resistance and liberation foundations. By skirting the question of the source of the violence, Indigenous people become stuck in a perpetual state of

trauma victim. This narrative erases the violence of the state and its systems, allowing the continuation of an agenda to eradicate all that is considered Indigenous and replace it with settler colonial bodies and ontologies. With a critical analysis of trauma and healing, I believe it is safer for Indigenous people to explore what healing could look like outside of trauma victim narratives - Indigenous people do deserve to find peace, safety and joy in their bodies without it being an enforced prerequisite for self-governance and liberation.

Through this critique of trauma and healing narratives, I address the following questions: Does the literature on children and youth address how settler colonial violence manifests in the lives, experiences, and wellbeing of Indigenous youth, if so, how? What do moves toward liberation look like given this biopolitical framework of our current political and social landscape? The following sections includes discussions of: violence and resistance to pathologizing healing frameworks; healing processes and methods which move away from such pathologizing and settler state agendas; the current limitations within the field of Indigenous healing; taking up queer and feminist processes to imagining anti-colonial healing practices; and finally examples of peer-led and Indigenous youth-led visions for wellness and liberation.

Complicating Trauma and Healing Frameworks: Resisting Colonial Pathologizing

White supremacy and settler colonialism create conditions that ensure that violence and harm are inflicted upon Indigenous bodies which is embedded within ever present systems and structures in settler colonial states. In the article, “Reimagining Girlhood in White Settler-Carceral States,” Carere, Kreuger-Henney, and Palacios (2019) unravel the nuances of gender-based settler violence in the lives of Indigenous youth and communities. They call us to witness the ways in which resistance is “woven from diverse everyday spaces” and “how youth engage

in intimate, politicized, scholarly acts of decolonizing through unsanitized telling's and radical doings" (de Finney, et. al., 2019, p. viii). Furthermore, they outline the subversive and invisibilized ways in which the settler state inflicts violence on Indigenous and racialized bodies: "biopolitics and necropolitics function simultaneously under settler modes of incarceration and extermination by managing, policing, and criminalizing marked bodies through paradoxical invisibility and hypervisibility, while insisting on the sanctity of white life" (deFinney, et. al., 2019, viii). de Finney et. al. term these systems and structures transcarceral institutions. They argue that "the colonial state is emboldened by its commitment to transcarceral institutional violence, operating across social systems such as schools, foster care, juvenile and migrant detention centers, mental health, and institutions dealing with special needs." (de Finney et. al., 2019, x). Therefore, the biopolitics and necropolitics of the settler state operate through a "transcarceral pipeline" (de Finney et. al., 2019, x) that marks bodies for disposability via neoliberal policies and agendas:

The transcarceral state apparatus is sustained through multiple kinds of difficult-to-contest deaths that fuel the extraction of illegitimate bodies, including deaths in custody such as uninvestigated prison deaths, what are known as stand-your-ground assaults, migrant/border capture, death by containment and neglect in child welfare and detention centers, death by bureaucratic violence such as the Indian Act, and death by medicalization and psycho-pathology when, for instance, sexual violence trauma is reduced to a mental health issue, and suicides in custody (de Finney et al. 2018, x).

As we see in the work by de Finney et al. (2018), the violence of settler colonialism manages Indigenous bodies and wraps around families and communities through the institutionalization of death via transcarceral institutions - such as the education, justice, and child welfare systems -

that are disguised to help and heal and rely on a politics of recognition on an individual and bodily scale (de Finney, et. al., 2018; Hunt, 2015; Million, 2015). These institutions carry out the settler state's agenda to destroy Indigenous bodies to make way for settler infrastructure, settler worldviews and settler futures on Native land.

Biopolitics therefore helps us understand how dominant normative discourses are weaponized to control and inflict brutality upon Indigenous people and communities. Dian Million's book, *Therapeutic Nations: Healing in the Age of Indigenous Human Rights*, illustrates how dominant discourses on healing Indigenous peoples in Canada, championed by the TRC, pathologizes the Indigenous subject, and deems them not able to self-govern until the healing process is complete. It is worth noting that IRS survivors did ask for a healing fund, but they did not want it in place of structural change (Vanthuyne and Capitaine, 2017). Million explains how "healing from trauma begins to be narrated as a prerequisite to self-determination. If the Indigenous don't heal, they may not be able to self-govern; in any case, they would need to heal to be self-sufficient." (Million, 2013, p. 106) Therefore, Indigenous people become framed as trauma victims, who must heal to become recognized as deserving or able to self-govern. All the while, Canada continues to inflict its violence via genocidal logics on Indigenous lands and bodies that necessitates its sovereignty.

Million shows how the healing agenda in Canada has been used to further neoliberal development of the Indigenous subject in their analysis of researcher Sousan Abadian's program: *Culture as Treatment* (2013, p. 121). Abadian's research on the connection of Indigenous trauma to the "success of failure of Indigenous development" results in influencing Indigenous communities to take up her ideas of "culture as treatment" (2013, 116). Significantly, Abadian disavows a political analysis of Indigenous healing and insists on individual healing as

a pathway to an eventual collective ability to be well and subsequently to self-govern. Abadian expresses how whale hunts by the Makah “are inconsistent with basic realities,” deeming it a practice of cultural healing that is not useful or realistic – marking relationship with place and food insignificant to Indigenous wellness. Million questions Abadian’s assertion:

What are these basic realities? Is it that the Makah’s desire to put their living culture in relationship again with the whale does not agree with Abadian’s personal conservation beliefs, beliefs that have cultural assumptions of their own? Or is it that she thinks, as a development professional, that the Makah should not exercise the treaty rights that define their spiritual, social, and political presence to the nation-state? Or, more to my point here, is it that culture is good as individual/ community therapeutic practice but unimaginable as relational practices that inform governments, ways of living in places? (2013, p. 116).

Neocolonial healing programs, which evidence biopolitical power, engage the Indigenous subject into a willful commitment of becoming a healed individual on the pathway to building healthy communities and finally to exhibit the competence to self-govern. This sets a trajectory for Indigenous people and communities that undermines the significance and necessity of ongoing resistance to colonialism and the strengthening of Indigenous governance and political authority in creating healthy Indigenous futures.

A more robust and anticolonial vision of wellness acknowledges ongoing genocidal settler colonialism and the cyclical process of both enacting and carrying our political, legal, kinship and governance practices and finding our own ways to honour ourselves, find love and care for ourselves and each other, and be held in our communities – which are all in alignment with the regeneration and caretaking of our relations to land, each other and the spirit world

(Million, 2013). Today, we see how healing and land-based healing is conceptualized and encouraged in dominant discourse, yet when Indigenous people claim their territories as a place of relationship where presence, culture, law and responsibility are also held, they are often met with militarized police raids and jail time (Simmons, 2021). This is illustrated in one example by the contemporary militarized raids of Wet'suwet'en Yintah, where matriarchs and their supporters have been violently ripped off their lands by RCMP with assault rifles and arrested for being Wet'suwet'en on their homelands, which is on the route of a potentially lucrative resources extraction project for Canada, the Coastal Gas Link pipeline. (Simmons, 2021).

Carere (2017) and Million's (2013) contributions to the field help frame my analysis of literature pertaining to Indigenous wellness. My work in the field of therapeutic approaches aims to draw on Gitksan-specific knowledge and healing practices, that reach back (and forward) to somatic traditions and spiritual connection, as well as taking into consideration the empowerment and belonging that Gitksan governance and kinship systems provide. Million (2013) speaks to the ways that culture-based healing programs can become a tool of neoliberal settler colonial fantasy's by making the healing processes individualized, and detaching spiritual and cultural practices from place, governance and law. In contrast, therapeutic approaches that incorporate resistance as foundational aspect to wellness, as well as anti-colonial frameworks, allow for healing experiences that remove the "problem" from the bodies of Indigenous people, and place it within the state's genocidal logic and its violent systems and structures. This can allow for freedom from an oppression that lives in the body.

Reclaiming and Creating: Moves Away from Colonial Categorization

In reclaiming Indigenous wellness processes, which are aligned with resistance to ongoing attacks on Indigenous people, I look to the work of Dupuis-Rossi, a Metis therapist, and Reynolds, a white settler therapist, who speak to the need for decolonial and Indigenous approaches to healing from violence within Indigenous communities. In Dupuis-Rossi's article with Vikki Reynolds, "Indigenizing and decolonizing therapeutic responses to trauma-related dissociation" (2019) they explain that Indigenous peoples experiences with violence, intimate and systemic, stem from colonialism, and dissociation can become a coping mechanism to protect from and resist colonial violence. Dupuis-Rossis also frames Indigenous people's survival mechanisms as a symptom of ongoing structural and systemic colonial violence. They refuse the pathologizing of Indigenous people and reject pervasive narratives of Indigenous people being broken or inherently prone to trauma. This is stressed as:

The language of trauma invisibilizes the violence of ongoing colonialism and locates our interests, as practitioners, in symptoms and diagnoses, which are personalized, individuated, and constructed as the responsibility of the client, as if their personal strength or resiliency, as opposed to structural oppression, is the issue (2019, 295).

Following the therapeutic response to recovering from violence, Dupuis-Rossi outlines a decolonizing healing approach and acknowledge dissociation as a form of coping:

1. Rapport and trust building: honouring indigeneity.
2. Contextualizing dissociation and trauma in colonialism.
3. Developing internal safety: culturally relevant grounding and containment.
4. Connecting to self, safe others, and an Indigenous worldview: learning traditional teachings and participating in safe Ceremonies (2019, 296).

Drawing on an example from Dupuis-Rossi's practice, they show how they situate their Indigenous client, who has experienced displacement, within an Indigenous community context through an envisioning exercise to create a sense of safety and belonging. Dupuis-Rossi explains: "I, Riel, built a decolonizing relationship by directly acknowledging Kluane, an urban-raised Indigenous woman with Indian status, as a disinherited and dislocated knowledge keeper, medicine woman, and healer." (2019, p. 299) In this work, Dupuis-Rossi frames "the trauma and its resulting *symptoms* in a sociopolitical and historical context," (2019, p. 300) allowing for contrasting narratives of resistance and strength, linked to cultural lineage, to frame resistance and survival, rather than a victimizing narrative. They speak of the importance of politicizing trauma as a way to remove the burden of colonial violence from the bodies of Indigenous people, putting it back on the state, which can allow for healing, self-actualization, and freedom from shame.

Dupuis-Rossi (2019) also uses somatic and visualization exercises to promote grounding and containment in sessions, explaining several exercises, including one where they lead the client through a visualization exercise of a canoe journey. This leads the client through a forest and to her ancestors that are drumming her home. The client's favorite traditional foods are there, and she is welcomed with love, protection, and acceptance. This therapeutic exercise allows for the client to feel internal safety and security, while acknowledging kinship protection and belonging that was taken from her (2019, p. 307). But to ignore where settler colonial oppression is coming from, and who it that harm is serving, risks pathologization and victimhood and enables ongoing logics of elimination in settler states.

This erasure can happen in many ways, even with the best of intentions. For example, in Grayshield, Begay and Luna's chapter "IWOK Epistemology in Counseling Praxis" (2020), they

introduce the concept of Indigenous ways of knowing (IWOK) and advocate for their use in the helping profession. They insist that “dis-ease in physical, psychological, and emotional well-being from an IWOK epistemology would be defined by the degree and/or level of disconnect from nature” (2020, p. 8). They draw on Indigenous knowledges and worldviews to inform healing practices, and claim that “the primary underlying epistemological stance of an indigenous thought process [IWOK] in its most authentic expression is oneness with Nature, or as some have postulated, one with God” (2020, 8). Here, “nature” as a concept is removed from the political context and relationship that gives it meaning. Although this offers some insight into Indigenous worldviews, it is a reductive understanding of Indigenous knowledge and risks separating Indigenous knowledge from its political grounding. It is the relationships within place that forms the foundations of Indigenous law and governance, which is specific to particular territories.

Our therapeutic attempts must be fundamentally opposed to neoliberal depoliticized settler colonial healing paradigms. I have chosen not to do an in-depth critique of much of the literature that does not adhere to liberatory frameworks, but it is worthwhile to offer a brief overview of a fragment of the literature to illuminate the current limitations in the field, and to inform and validate the path forward for my work.

Among the chapters in Stewart, Moodley and Hyatt’s edited work, “Indigenous cultures and mental health counselling: Four directions for integration with counselling psychology” (2017), are discussions of culture as treatment, and reductive notions of Indigeneity that inspire therapeutic methods. As warned by Million, neoliberal healing paradigms that use of ceremony to heal, with no acknowledgment of systemic and structural impositions of violence, and using Indigenous symbolism atop of colonial healing methods and naming them as Indigenous

methods undermines Indigenous liberation. The symbols of Indigeneity that are showcased in these therapeutic practices taken out of context are reminiscent of an Imaginary Indian, created in the psyche of colonialism.

To highlight the risks of building on such colonial frameworks, the following passage demonstrates the potential pitfalls of slapping Indigenous symbolism on colonial ideologies of healing:

Employing the recovery paradigm of Alcoholics Anonymous through the usage of the twelve steps, White Bison, Inc. (2002) created a unique culture-based approach that employs the Medicine Wheel as its overarching metaphor and methodology for recovery. To that end, the original twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous have been reworded to resonate with Indigenous peoples' understandings and experiences. Making use of the Medicine Wheel metaphor, the recovery process is contextualized as beginning in the eastern direction—a place of new beginnings—and involves a process of moving around the wheel through the directions of east, south, west, and north.” (2017, p. 9).

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is a Christian program that focuses on a linear progression based on the 12 steps to recovery. It is abstinence based, and relies on the problem of addiction as a failing of the individual, and the healing as individual choice. This program has extremely low success rates, opposed to a harm reduction model that can be accompanied by restoring dignity and placing struggles with substances within the context of reasonable self-medication and self-preservation within insufferable conditions. Furthermore, AA is punitive and based on redemption, rather than collective care and resistance. In the neoliberal healing programs discussed above, they do not address colonial and gender-based violence, there is a focus on

healing the “soul wound” which is based in a perceived singular and historical moment of colonial harm (Million, 2013).

My critique is not to say that these methods do not work for some people, but I align myself with Million, Carere, and others who insist that Indigenous wellness initiatives must be informed by resistance to settler colonial and gender-based violence which do not fit into settler, cis-heteronormative, and neoliberal discourses of healing. Resistance and refusal must be a central framework in our understanding of trauma, and the ways that we have been forced to stay alive. Resistance is also necessary as a lens through which we understand our narratives of ourselves and our communities, to resist pathology and victimry in the very discourses of healing.

Feminist And Queer Theories of Indigenous Resistance and Healing

Feminist and queer theories can help us move beyond neoliberal prescriptive and normative discourses for healing. Million highlights this in her discussion on felt political engagement, where she discusses the legacy of Indigenous women carrying our Nations into political realities that can allow for wellness. Million explains: “It had been Indigenous women who first insisted on articulating holistic concerns, ones that necessarily included personal and familial concerns with economic well-being. A holistic sense of well-being as a goal embedded in community relations may have been politic and caring, but it was not therapeutic” (Million, 2013, 21). Represented in Million’s discussion of Indigenous feminism are respected Indigenous scholars, community activists and artists. To add to Million’s offering, queer and gender non-conforming folks have also always been championing a felt political discourse and path forward. Very significant to the project of settler colonial genocide is the erasure of queer and gender

non-conforming bodies (Hunt, 2018). Tłaliłila'ogwa/Sarah Hunt discusses the erasure of trans and queer Native folks and develops an Indigenous gender-based analysis to illustrate how gender intersects with experiences of colonial based violence in the chapter “Embodying Self-Determination: Beyond the Gender Binary” (2018). Further, Hunt demonstrates how colonial enforcement of the gender binary and erasure of Indigenous queer and transness is at the heart of settler colonial attacks on Indigenous sovereignty (Hunt, 2018).

Queerness has been made illegal, has been associated with sexual deviance and has been and continues to be socially ostracized. The breadth and power of gender and sexuality diversity which was once alive and well in Indigenous communities has been violently attacked in the project to create cis-heteronormative patriarch subjects, families and communities (Hunt, 2018). The ever existence and resistance of queer and gender non-conforming people in our communities, our homes, and in larger political activist spaces force us to expand our world building processes that often get stuck in the mud of settler colonial patriarchy and misogyny.

In the book chapter, “Ongoing storms and struggles: Gendered violence and resource exploitations” (2020), Mishuana Goeman uses fiction to explore Indigenous feminist theory on healing and resistance. Drawing on Linda Hogan’s novel *Solar Storms*, Goeman finds examples of the expansive possibilities of Indigenous feminist resistance to settler colonial containment, violence, and narratives. Goeman’s work examines the “spatial injustice and Native feminist practices in the weaving of this story that enable us to delve more deeply into the ways that gendered and sexualized violence has multiple connections that spread out on vertical and horizontal scales” (2020, p. 100). Feminist and queer theories break felt categories of containment, which settler logics rely on to dispose of and violate Indigenous bodies, lands and knowledges. Goeman discusses Hogan’s “language and work with these three generations of

women, we see a wrestling to find a place in which the spatial and temporal are not controlled solely by settler discourse and bodies and lands become conduits of connection rather than impermeable entities” (2020, p. 100). Goeman suggests that we consider how the body is a place of “ontological origin” for the ways that broader “social, political, and economic systems of meanings” connect and that once we do that, we can “uproot it from narrowly defined colonial scales” (2020, p. 102). This re-working of our understanding of non-normative Indigenous bodies as conduits rather than “impermeable entities”, particularly womens, queer, trans bodies, and 2spirit bodies, allows us to expand our wellness practices from the place of “ontological origin” that is in contestation with settler state logics of destruction.

Goeman expresses how the body experiences settler colonialism and grapples with the impossibility of trying to “heal” while the attacks continue in marked bodies and spaces (2020). Thus, the brutality of settler colonialism does not end in the individual body, but moves between bodies, lands, waters, family, and community. The material forces of settler colonialism continue, therefore healing processes must account for ongoing harm. Goeman focuses us on reclaiming the body, and understanding the multiplicity of discourses that can inhabit our bodies:

how do bodies remember colonization and its processes, and how do we disrupt the recurring discourses that stem them? Furthermore, how do we reclaim the body that continues to be structured through the violence of settler colonialism? (2020, p. 111)

My work as a research and community member has required me to be moved by affect, to come home to my body, to resist the ways I have been stolen from myself. Reclaiming our bodies and ourselves, stolen from settler colonialism’s dehumanization, misogyny, homophobia, ablism, etc. must be the foundation of our healing paradigms.

Natalie Clark draws on intersectional theory to inform her therapeutic practices with Indigenous girls. In her article, “Red Intersectionality and Violence-Informed Witnessing Praxis with Indigenous Girls” Clark claims, “we are not victims”. Forefronting the personal and political existence of Indigenous girls, Clark is explicit about the connection between place and body, which is outlined by Carere (2017) and Goeman (2020) as well. Clark expresses that “Indigenous feminists remind us again and again in their writing that violence has always been gendered, aged, and linked to access to land” (Clark, 2016, 49). Clark insists that movements towards justice and healing must centre Indigenous knowledge and worldview and must not “replicate the erasure of Two-spirit and trans peoples in our communities, but instead...attends to the many intersecting factors including gender, sexuality and a commitment to activism and Indigenous sovereignty” (2016, 51).

Furthermore, Clark resists a trauma narrative which “continues the colonial reach and the entrenchment of Western European medical model approaches and colonizing health services that continue to perpetuate narratives of risk located within Indigenous girls and their families and communities” (2016, p. 51). In this article, Clark situates Indigenous girls’ experiences as taking place within “intersecting axes of social location, power and resistance” along with “mental health, criminal justice and child welfare system policies and programs” (2016, p. 53).

Peer-Led Indigenous Youth Health and Wellness

Queering wellness and promoting language which is life affirming for queer and gender non-conforming folks in our communities is inherently anti-colonial and offers tangible steps toward liberated futures. Further, creating pathways which are *not* recognizable by neoliberal

frameworks and visions for Indigenous people are central to doing meaningful healing work (Hunt, 2018).

To close this section, I want to highlight the work of The Native Youth Sexual Health Network (NYSHN), which creates peer resources for Indigenous youth around sexual and reproductive health, mental health, and social justice. Their newest resource, *You Are Made of Medicine: A Mental Health Peer Support Manual for Indigiqueer, Two-spirit LGTBQ+, and Gender Non-Conforming Indigenous Youth*, was written by and for Indigiqueer, Two-Spirit, and LGBTQ+ Indigenous youth. This manual is a peer support tool, covering many topics around the mental and physical wellbeing of Indigenous youth. The manual is relevant and grounded, and it is accessible and welcoming to read; it covers language and protocol around mental health terms and gender identity, settler colonial trauma and ways to understand it, how to seek support and begin to understand ourselves and ways to reach out, and strategies for taking care of ourselves and our bodies. NYSHN toolkits and resources outline the importance of using gender affirming language; they offer an in-depth protocol for replacing harmful stigmatising words that are “shaming/blaming” and honour the pronouns and language that people choose to describe themselves. This is life affirming community care.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the discourses and paradigms of Indigenous healing, the limitations in the field, and potential practices and pathways which allow for resistance and movement outside of colonial categories of the Indigenous subject. Although there are limitations in the current literature, the work of Hunt (2018), Carere (2017), Million (2013), Clark (2016), Dupuis-Rossi (2020) and the Native Youth Sexual Health collective (2011),

among others, show potential frameworks for wellness work which is subversive and challenging to genocidal settler colonial logics. These learnings inform my research goals and plans for workshops with Gitksan youth as I aim to create opportunities to subvert settler colonial pathologization.

Chapter Three

Kinship Rising Research Process and Findings

Here, I uphold the knowledge and experiences from this research that are felt and held communally, and which stand on their own. I tie these experiences and reflections into conversation with the literature in the next chapter. This chapter offers an in-depth review of the research project itself, and its findings, framed by a critical felt Gitxsan methodology and theory-work informed by refusal, resistance, and Indigenous-led wellness modalities. The research project, Gwalxyee'enst, consisted of workshops, a mural and a feast ceremony in partnership with New Hazelton Elementary School. The central ideas of the workshops and mural revolved around power, agency, care, love and resistance. The workshops intended to invite students into a space of creativity, self-expression and self-representation. As explored in previous chapters, the research project itself is a refusal of the pathologization of Indigenous bodies, particularly youth, and aims to focus on resistance and empowerment rather than a need to be healed or redeemed. In this chapter, I review the methods and the processes of this research project, my interpretation of this work through artistic methods, and general findings from the workshops with youth at the school. Finally, this chapter provides an overview of the workshops themselves and the ways in which we engaged with the community, school, faculty, artist and students.

Why Is This Work Important?

As explored briefly in the introduction, during my work with the Gyets Gitxsan IRS program I spent many hours interviewing elders, survivors of IRS, and Simogyet and Sigidimhanak, as they shared their experiences with Indian Education (IRS and Indian Day Schools). In these interviews, all the participants insisted on the importance of Gitxsan youth,

and younger generations knowing who they are as Gitksan people (Mowatt, 2018). This was expressed to be central to the survival of our Gitksan way of life - healthy, thriving and joyous. Therefore, my doctoral research is meant to honour the call by the participants of Gyets Gitksan IRS, as well as other Gitksan elders and family who have shared their time and their stories with me. In the realm of scholarship, this research project offers a challenge to mainstream settler colonial pathologization and the arbitrariness of claimed expertise, or hierarchical knowledge making and holding. This means that I am not claiming to be doing something ground-breaking or new; this work is done in an ecosystem model, non-hierarchical, cyclical, all parts are equally important - which has been modelled by many other Gitksan scholars and community members before me and alongside me. I have not set out to be an expert, or a pioneer of a certain type of research or knowledge. I have set out to do my best to be accountable, responsible, and present in a project that has brought funding into my community to respond to a need.

Research Background and Overview

Kinship Rising is a community- and arts-based research project funded through the Social Science and Humanities Research Council and the Canet Foundation. Over the past few years, I have been honoured to work with Kinship Rising in multiple roles, including as a facilitator of healing arts-based workshops and mural creations, as a supporter during Indigenous youth arts-based workshops, and during research and writing workshops. Furthermore, I have been inspired by the work and methods of the Fearless Collective (Shiv-Suleman, 2018), drawing on liberatory arts-based facilitation while working with communities that live with legacies of colonial and imperial occupation and brutality. I was introduced to this practice when a group of us welcomed the Fearless Collective to our community on Lekwungen territories in

2017. At the time, led by Dr. Mandeep Kaur Mucina, we worked together with the Fearless team to bring together Indigenous folks and other diasporic groups in Victoria, to feel through and tell our personal, familial, and communal stories of gendered experiences of settler colonialism, imperialism, and borders (Mowatt et al, 2022). This work, and the continual work of Kinship Rising and the Fearless Collective, inspires me to bring liberation informed art practices into my community practice and utilize arts-based knowledges to reclaim and restore what has been stolen (Mowatt, et. al. 2022).

When invited by Dr. Carere to create a Kinship Rising project in my community, Hazelton, BC, in 2021 I first reached out to Pansy Wright-Simms, a Matriarch and leader in my Wilp and in our Nation. Pansy agreed to be our community liaison for the SSHRC application, and helped develop our proposal and vision for the project.

Research Considerations: What, How, Who, Where, And Why

We started to plan the research workshops for Gitxsan territory as the COVID-19 pandemic began to spread in British Columbia. At this time, due to the high levels of risk, in-person research shut down. Kinship Rising moved to online research, therefore the research project extended to a much longer timeline. During the following two years of the pandemic, Pansy continued to be in touch with us and assured us that the work was important and necessary, and that the time would come for us to come to Hazelton to roll out the vision of the project. When COVID restrictions began to lift, most people were vaccinated, and we were ready to start to plan the work, we reached out to Pansy with some of our ideas. We explained the mandate of Kinship Rising, and what we had to offer as facilitators.

We invited Pansy to be our community liaison; this role is for us to ensure accountability and to help us know where and how we should be orienting our work in the community. Pansy agreed to work with us and her knowledge and connection within the community are invaluable. Pansy spreads her love and care to everyone she meets. She is also very passionate about supporting youth in connecting with who they are as Gitksan people. We told Pansy that we feel comfortable working with the themes of Gitksan wellness, anti-colonialism, self-representation, gender-based violence, and community building, and that we would like to bring resources into the community to support. We asked if she knew of any project we could build on or if she had any ideas that would work for this project and she immediately pointed us towards New Hazelton Elementary School (NHES) where we would end up doing our project. Pansy's ethics of community care, Gitksan resurgence and wellness aligned with this vision, and soon she connected us to New Hazelton Elementary School to collaborate on their dream of Gitksan representation and youth empowerment in their institution. My sibling Morgan also came to support the project as a co-researcher. We often work on projects together and I feel inspired and comfortable working with them. We work very differently and tend to ensure the largest to smallest details are not missed.

Situating The Project

New Hazelton is historically and contemporarily a mostly (with the expectation of a few BIPOC settler families) white settler space and Old Hazelton, or Gitanmaax, is mostly reserve. NHES has about a 98% Gitksan population yet has been very western in its use of course content, and in its spatial and physical representation (the building is an archetype of a public school in BC). Gitksan staff at the school have been working tirelessly to promote Gitksan

culture and language in curriculum and programming to ensure the students have opportunities to engage with Gitxsan knowledge at school. We learned that the late Hilda Olsen, Gitxsan Matriarch, had been working for many years to ensure there was Gitxsan representation at the school, specifically language and culture programming. Hilda and the other Gitxsan staff had been advocating for a mural which would represent the commitment to bringing Gitxsan knowledge into the school and for the students to see themselves represented on the building.

Pansy connected us to Angie Olsen who was the current language and culture teacher and the principal Jan Thorburn to discuss planning, and they were excited to have us come on board. They hoped we could have Gitxsan artist, Michelle Stoney, be the artist that leads the mural, and we also hoped to have Michelle on the project. We reached out to Michelle and she agreed to collaborate on the project with us. From there, we created workshops and collaborated with Michelle to plan a mural in tandem with the research project. This was the foundation of our planning for the research project, how the project came to be and how we built a small network of accountability in our planning phase.

The school insisted that all students be involved, and we came to see this is essential as well. Although I had not foreseen working with students as young as kindergarten for this research, we were honoured to be able to offer workshops and gifts (art supplies and backpacks) to every student at the school, along with our closing feast. In preparation for this project, we amended the Kinship Rising ethics documents, and created parental and student consent forms, and registration forms for the faculty helpers and the students involved. We also received a letter of support from the school, and we signed an MOU between Kinship Rising, NHES, and Michelle.

The Project Itself

The potential harms of research were understood and acknowledged by the community members, staff and the artist involved in this research. When we discussed the lineage of colonialism and harmful extractivism in research, Pansy, our community partner, Angie Olsen, our faculty helper, and Jan Thorburn, the NHES Principal, expressed that they were aware of these risks and trusted our process and our intention with the project. Though not owed to us, I was honoured to feel that the work we would do together was built on an assumption of trust and good intentions. A part of this trust, I believe, comes from my family's relationships in the community, roots, ties, and blood connections that are honoured within our Gitxsan Nation. This base of trust allowed for me to feel comfortable and confident to move with ideas and concepts for the workshops and the project with the school. This trust also became a gift to the youth, as they could engage in a project that had good intentions and trusting energy within it. The teachers we worked with were excited to have this project come to the youth and to honour our Gitxsan Nation and knowledge keepers and majagalee. It was seen as important work which we would take seriously and treat with care.

Morgan, their partner Chris, their baby Sim Maa'y (my nibling) and I travelled up north to get ready to roll out our workshops. I spent a few weeks collecting all the goods we needed for the workshops we were planning to do with the youth. We brought with us 100 notebooks, 100, backpacks, 50 crayon sets, and 50 pens. We also brought hide for medicine bundles, some of which I bought from Lindsay Delaronde, a Mohawk artist. The medicines that we brought came from Sarah Rhude, a Mikmaw artist on Lekwungen territory. Sarah invited us to her home, where she gifted us bundles of coastal sage and paper bags full of devil's club she had harvested and processed. We went into her back yard where she grows a beautiful bounty of medicinal

plants and food. She gifted us sweetgrass from her homelands and invited us to harvest more sage from her medicine garden.



Figure 1. Plant medicines and gifts for workshops. (photo by author)

The workshops were designed in collaboration with Angie, and we consulted with Michelle as well to ensure the themes of the workshops would help inspire the mural design. Every grade at NHES has a language and culture class with Angie once a week, so we were able to come to Angie's classroom and see each class in the school during their allotted time with her that week. To see every student in every grade, we held workshop over 2 weeks. Angie provided feedback and support in our design of workshops, the timeline for the project, supporting students in getting their forms in, setting up and taking down our space, and significantly scaling our workshops for kindergarten to grade 3 children, as we had not worked with youth this age before.

We created two workshop plans, one appropriate for kindergarten to grade three and one appropriate for grades four to seven. We did not do any information and data gathering and documentation with the kindergarten – grade three students, therefore we did not go over or sign consent or registration forms with them. For these grades, we simply offered creative workshops. We did, however, go over consent and registration with the grade four to seven students. We had confidence that we could ethically engage with them around the project and explain what research entails, what consent means in this context, and give them the option to participate. We required consent forms from both the students and their guardians and had each of them register as participants - this was quite the process but allowed for us to feel comfortable during the workshops and enabled us to give them gifts and gift cards to honour their part in the research and mural. Each the student at the school, from kindergarten – grade seven, were gifted a backpack and art supplies (notebook and pen) to show them our respect and gratitude for offering their vulnerability and sharing their time and wisdom with us in the workshops.

For the workshop format, we invited the students into circle, provided a space of them to engage in an activity, asked them questions and allowed of them to share and process ideas as we used the materials to create the medicine bundles. The research questions we used to guide the workshops were designed to stir the knowledge and resources that the students have within themselves and their circles of connection that provide them with safety, joy, love, calm, and comfort. We asked the questions and opened our workshops up to discussion as students were engaged in a creative arts process to incorporate peer witnessing of each other's strengths, gifts, and resources. Engaging in an artistic process and using our hands was intended to create a sense of comfort and ease to share with each other in the workshop, and also, we hoped that the students could connect the themes we discussed with their art pieces to moments of felt experience with protection, cleansing and groundedness – so they can draw that reminder from the art pieces when they need it.

In all the workshops, we started by introducing ourselves and talking with the class about Kinship Rising, the mural, and how the school has been working hard to ensure that Gitxsan strengths, culture and pride are represented in the teachings at their school. We discussed how the mural would represent our territories, the Gitxsan Laxyip and who we are as Gitxsan, and most importantly who the students are, to showcase the love and strength of the Gitxsan Nation.

With the Kindergarten – grade three students, we introduced Michelle and explained that we hoped the students would help with the creative vision of the mural, the themes, the colours, images, etc. To do this, we asked them to close their eyes, take a deep breath, and imagine a time, a place, a feeling, a colour, an image, a sound, that made or makes them feel strong, happy and proud. We took a minute to imagine, and after a short time we asked the students to open their eyes, and for those who felt comfortable, to share what they saw. After their sharing, they

were invited to begin to use the materials we offered to create an art piece of what they imagined, by drawing, using colours, images, and words. They used pencil crayons, crayons, felt markers, and various colours and papers.

The students then had an opportunity to share their pieces with us and the class as an act of witnessing and knowledge sharing among peers. The students were sensitive and deep thinkers, they contemplated the questions and shared beautiful, imaginative, and creative insights about what it was like to feel strong, happy and proud. Michelle would witness the artistic and self-expression from the students and use that information to draw inspiration for the mural design.

Our workshops with the grade four to seven classes, had a more complex process of creation and more pointed questions. In these workshops, we sat in a circle and made medicine bundles together. We wanted to take time with them to explore ideas of safety, and strength, which would help inspire the themes for the mural. We explained who Michelle was (most students already knew!) and were able to express the meaning of the mural, and how the school wanted to support the staff and students in representing Gitxsan strength, sovereignty, connection to place, and the significance of Gitxsan culture and pride. We shared how the mural would signify protection and connection.

We shared that the mural was being created to remind the students of who they are, and that they are part of a powerful lineage. We proceeded to introduce the medicine bundle workshop and explain the significance of the materials and the bundles. We took time to introduce each medicine we were using, ask the students for their input and their thoughts on each medicine. We discussed their power, and some students shared their personal and familial connection to the medicines.

We used devils club, coastal and inland sage, and sweetgrass. We talked about the devils club, and how it offers protection, how the spikey bits offer strong medicine to protect our spirit and the plant holds significant healing properties and has many uses in our Gitksan cultural and many other Indigenous Nations on the west coast of BC. This devils club was harvested on Kwak'waka'wakw territory, we talked about where that is, and who those people are and paid respect to them for allowing us to use this medicine from their lands. The sage we used represents cleansing, and we discussed how this medicine can be burned to cleanse our bodies and spirits, and send away negative feelings and emotions that are not serving us. The sage we used was coastal sage from Coast Salish territory, and some inland sage from the Okanagan area, again we paid our respect to the places which this medicine was harvested. We used Sweetgrass which was gifted to me from Mi'Kmaq scholar and medicine woman, Sarah Rhude, a friend who is living on Lekwungen territory. This Sweetgrass came from her homelands and we talk about the significance of its medicinal properties, and the ways that scent and burning this plant can help us be grounded and present.

During the workshops we offered the following questions for the students to consider: 1) what makes you feel protected? 2) what makes you feel cleansed? and 3) what makes you feel grounded and present? These questions invited students to reflect on the resources inside of themselves and their community in a creative way and connect that to place and spirituality (the plant medicines). As we created our medicine bundles, we kept all these ideas in our minds that were shared about the medicines, and what protects us, cleanses us, and grounds us. We discussed how it feels when we are protected, cleansed, grounded – what it feels like in our bodies and in our hearts. Much creativity, connection, brilliance, medicine, and grounded

knowledge was shared by each student in these workshops. Their peers witnessed them, and we held space for exchange of vulnerability and care.

At the end of all the workshops, students participated in picking a coloured heart. We asked that they put all of their good energy and thoughts into the heart they chose. We asked them to choose a colour that made them feel content, peaceful, happy, safe, and strong. Each student picked a colour that resonated with them. We gathered those hearts and sent the list of colours to Michelle, which she used as the main colours of the mural. The hearts that all the students picked and transferred their energy into were put into a big medicine bundle along with devil's club, sage and sweetgrass – that bundle now lives at the school to remind them of their power and agency.



Figure 2. Hide and coloured hearts from workshops. (photo by author)



Figure 3. Hide with coloured hearts and medicines for large bundle. (photo by author)

We shared general themes and ideas that the students offered in the medicine bundle making workshops with Michelle to be incorporated in the mural design process.

Michelle then went to work to make the vision of the school and, especially the students, come to reality in the mural design. The design includes the prominent Stekyoden mountain that looks over the Gitxsan territory, silhouettes of children and adults holding hands, and an owl representing the late Hilda Olsen. She used the colours that the students had chosen for the mural that indicate their inner joy, peace and comfort. Michelle worked in an empty classroom in the school to draw out the design on panels and students were able to join her to help paint when they had free time. Students got to visit with Michelle and learn skills around mural making and design, painting and how mural projects evolve and hold pieces of the artists and inspiration within them.

Also included on either side of the mural are panels of all four clans of the Gitxsan to represent our Gitxsan kinship, governance, and belonging. The clans are Wolf, Frog, Fireweed and Eagle. Within the mountain on the mural, every student at the school put their handprint. Michelle aligned the mountain on the mural to perfectly fit the mountain scape behind the school, which is breathtaking. Above the mountain is an owl, the animal that represents the late Hilda Olson, whose knowledge, love, care and commitment over many years at NHES profoundly influenced and inspired staff and students.

Feast (Liligyet): Gifting and Food as a Part of the Research and Gitxsan Governance

To honour the completion of the project and the mural, we held a feast. The Feast (Liligyet) is our governance system which marks important legal and familial events, which has been referred to by elders as our house of parliament. The Liligyet system is the governance

system in which all decisions are made and ratified in all aspects of Gitxsan life. The feast system is explained by Hannamauxw (Joan Ryan at the time) in the Beynon collection. She explains that significant to the feast is the act of witnessing: “The Chiefs and House members act as witnesses to all transactions included in the agenda for the feast, putting their seal of approval (or disapproval) on each” (2000, p. 66). The feast was held to honour the work of the students, Michelle, and the staff and to commemorate the mural and ratify the work that was done. There were over 100 people present, including students, staff, and community members. The students served stew and treats to all who came to sit. At the feast, Pansy, Michelle, Angie, Jan, Shirley (elder and knowledge keeper) and Dr. Jane Smith (elder and knowledge keeper) shared sentiments and we gifted them with canvas prints of the mural. These women made the project possible, their commitment to youth and our community is a testament to the great Gitxsan love that they carry forward and share in all that they do.



Figure 4. Plant medicines and gifts for teachers and helpers. (photo by author)



Figure 5. Morgan and Sim Maa'y prepare gifts for students. (photo by author)

Knowledge Production



Figure 6. Mrs. O's classroom ready for medicine bundle workshop. (photo by author)

In normative research practices, this information would be gathered and shared as data, but here I do not see it as necessary to list off what the students shared about their intimate experiences and connections for the purpose of data sharing alone. The knowledge that was produced in the workshops is held by each student, it was co-created with the medicine bundles, us as researchers, Michelle, the teachers, and relationships in the students' lives – therefore, the knowledge produced is held in the students and in the community. As a facilitator and researcher, I also co-facilitated the knowledge, and witnessed what was produced in the

workshops and it changed me. Therefore, I hold the knowledge produced in the workshops within me as well. The knowledge produced is a part of me, it is a part of the students, the teachers, Michelle and the materials, medicines, and the mural. My choice to leave out “traditional” qualitative data from this report is meant to honour the time and space with the students and orient the project to their needs and the community rather than to create a narrative of their experience to be commodified as an academic finding (Tallbear, 2013; Tuck, 2009).

As explored in earlier chapters, approaches to research with Indigenous communities has long been extractive and the narrative of the community created by non-community members can easily be coopted and placed within neoliberal frameworks of development (Million, 2013). My refusal to share specific details of what the youth expressed in the workshops is an attempt to do research that produces knowledge that lives in and for the community and the participants, full stop. Yet, we can witness some of the knowledge produced by spending time with the mural. I invite you to feel the mural, titled, Gwalxyee’erst: “To pass on knowledge from generation to generation.” What story does it tell, what does it stir in you? Breath in deep the colours that the youth chose to represent themselves, the imagery, the tone. This is some of the knowledge produced in this project, and you are engaging in a felt knowledge exchange.



Figure 7. Gwalxyee'ensst mural by Michelle Stoney on NHES. (photo provided by Angie Olsen)

The mural itself is significant to the community as the school requested our project to support in the ongoing attempts to bring Gitksan knowledge and representation into the BC public school system on Gitksan territory. The mural is a marker of Gitksan pride, continuity, and perseverance. The community is invited to witness the self-representation of the students in this mural, the collaboration between Gitksan women, gender diverse people, and the continuous claim of our territories and our children on Gitksan territory. The mural takes back space and reclaims Gitksan jurisdiction and Nationhood by exhibiting our four clans, the basis of our governance, and by showcasing the themes and tone that was brought forward by the students at NHES during the workshops. The mural asks the viewer to remember where they are, who they are accountable to and to consider Gitksan futures on Gitksan land, as the students and their handprints on the mountain mark a place that they call home and that calls them home – a place never surrendered or ceded.



Figure 8. Mural Design by Michelle Stoney. (photo provided by Michelle Stoney)

Another example of community-oriented knowledge production is the newsletter we created that was sent home with the NHES students to share the work they had done and their part in the mural with their families. This newsletter is part of the knowledge sharing in community, along with the feast. It was also a part of our accountability to the families of the students we worked with, and an invitation for families to discuss the workshops and the mural and what it means to the students who participated.

Highlights

My original vision for my doctoral research was to provide workshops with youth around themes similar to those explored above, but outside of connection to an institution. Since I am already working with a federally funded research project and the University of Victoria, the idea of navigating another institution (BC public school) to run a research project was not what I had envisioned. Although necessary, waiting on payment for our guests and artists was not ideal. The sometimes-complex webs of consent and ethics can be overwhelming and even undermine living relationships, and to have to another set of BC public school hoop jumping was not appealing to

me. Yet, this was the need identified by the community; we asked what we could do that would be beneficial for the community, and it was brought to us, so that is what we did.

The school principal, Jan Thorburn, teacher Angie Olsen, and the NHES staff made our work with them effortless, and they supported us and the project beyond what I could have hoped for. This is a similar experience to my master's research project. I had not imagined working with IRS survivors, doing research on IRS and Indian education, and conducting interviews with elders, chiefs, and survivors, but it was what I was directed towards by my family, and that project changed and humbled me significantly. Both my master's and doctoral research were co-created with family and community, they have been invitations to grow, be challenged and welcomed beyond my comfort zone. The beauty is that this type of work allows you to move from the neoliberal individualism that we are so often incentivized by in institutions to a surrendering, into a sometimes challenging, but loving, moving web of community that supports and holds you. I owe so much of how I understand integrity and good work to the people in my family and community that continue calling me home.

The students that we worked with at NHES are gifts and light in this world. They contemplated the questions we provided and shared strikingly beautiful, imaginative, and creative insights during the workshops. Working with the staff and faculty at NHES was extremely comfortable and they supported us in every way they could to make sure this project could happen for the youth they hold up every day. We were welcomed with so much kindness and care into their space. Being able to do this work with Gitksan youth on our territory was a great honour. Knowing that schools are a place that youth spend so much of their time, that can be hard and isolating for many, I am so grateful we could over this experience and hopefully leave something magical to hold onto.

In reflecting on my felt experience with this work, which was emotional, beautiful and dizzying in moments, I needed to rely on outlets and processes that could support me in expressing the multitudes of my own learning and change throughout and after the work. Doing this research project in my community, with Gitxsan children and youth, stirred stories in me of who I am and how I had arrived there. It had me feeling and thinking about my family lineage, about space and time, and about the liminal wave that I can't seem to exit. These experiences shaped my experience of research and felt methodology on multiple planes. Below I share some reflections and knowledge I produced via artistic processes and my felt experience while doing this research.

Art Pieces Explained

Nox Nijogamlaxlits t'aa

In the summer of 2022 on Saturna Island, I saw J-Pod, which is a family of Orcas whales. After the pod swam by, at the back appeared a giant-finned orca who swept the back and ensured the group's collection. Soon after, I dreamt of these whales, and in the dream was a tall-finned sweeper of the pod, very confident and calm. In my dream I watch this whale, she was so pronounced and powerful.

During the time I had this dream, I had been working through fears of what I have inherited, such as negative traits, anger, unpredictability, destructiveness. Remembrances of not feeling seen, loved, cared for or enough. I had been struggling with deep and sickening fears that I could never be soft, never be fully intimate or vulnerable in the world because of what I inherited. I feared that this was my nature or my fate. I feared this for my relationships, I feared this for my own healing work with myself, with youth and community.

As I reflected on the whale dream, I had another dream. In this dream my mother was cold, mean, angry and was screaming at me as a child. When I woke up, I was sick and disturbed; as I reflected with the feelings in the dream, I realized that I have never in my life experienced my mother in that state. My mother was only ever loving, gentle, kind, and emotionally vulnerable with me and my sibling. In this moment I realized that I also carry that felt experience – that it is completely possible for me to be vulnerable, loving, soft, kind, with myself, my close relationships and with complete strangers. These dreams reminded me that in my childhood, although fraught with fear and disorienting experiences, I also had a grounding and loving connection, which is just as much reachable as any of my other inheritances. This belief in myself and a remembrance that I hold a multitude of experiences and inheritances of love, care, and resistance, helps me to carry myself with love, compassion, forgiveness and flexibility.

The orca in my dream trailing the pod, making sure everyone stayed together, is my mother. My mother always put herself last, metaphorically and physically. She always trailed behind to ensure we were all safe on walks, hikes, bike rides. She always put herself last to ensure our safety, our comfort, and our joy. This design honours her gift to me. An ovoid with a circle in the middle represents the ability to look within ourselves and our experiences and gather new information and cultivate what we desire and need, a remembrance that there is always more to see, and the power to re-visit and re-story our pasts, present and futures, and our beliefs. The tall fin represents my mother's loving and gentle protection which I am grateful to have inherited.

I tattooed myself with this design when I was living in Hazelton in the fall/winter of 2022. The pictures are taken in my childhood home.



Figure 9. Nox Nijogamlaxlits t'aa tattoo design. (photo by author)



Figure 10. Nox Nijogamlaxlits t'aa tattoo design. (photo by author)

Sm'Algyax for babies

When we came to NHES for our Kinship Rising research project and were introduced to the students, our helper, Gitxsan culture and language teacher Angie Olson, had the students introduce themselves in Sm'Algyax, which for obvious reasons was incredibly moving. To see little Gitxsan's introducing themselves in their language was precious. Their introductions included their names, but also their pdeek, and wilp. We are a matrilineal clan system, this is our governance system, it is our key to belonging. So, this makes it so much more moving to know that these little ones have that knowledge for who they are and where they belong. Morgan and I loved hearing the introductions and joked to Angie that we wanted our own construction paper introductions sheets so that we could learn how to introduce ourselves this way. The next time we came to the school, Angie had made us our own introduction cards, the same as the students.

We were there as researchers bringing in money and a project, but in that moment, we were little Gitxsan babies, being cared for by Angie, who saw that our spirits needed this connection to who we are, just as much as the children in her classroom. This is an illustration of the way this project, for me, moved in time and space a bit unpredictably and out of order – at this moment I was both young Gitxsan learner, taken care of by a Gitxsan mother, or teacher, and I was also a project-lead, researcher sharing my medicine – I am always both and so much more all at once.

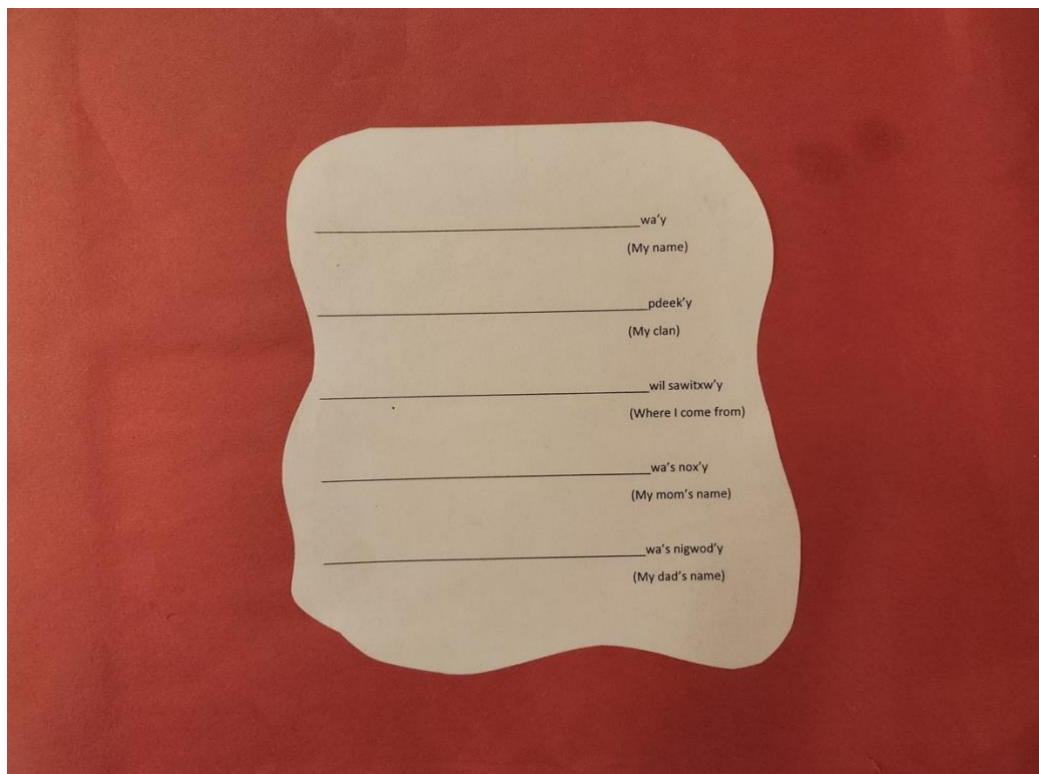


Figure 11. Sm'Algyax introduction sheet from Mrs. O. (photo by author)

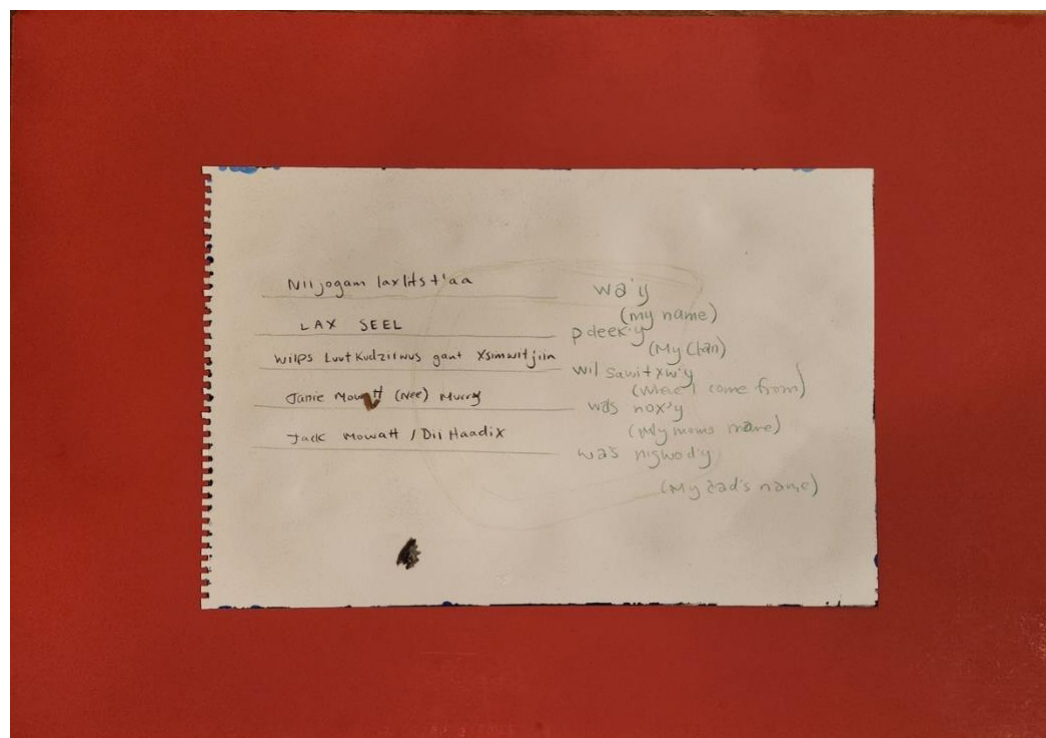


Figure 12. Sm'Algyax for Babies art piece by author. (photo by author)

Ovoid

This Ovoid created with pencil, paint, and incorporating medicines is inspired by the work of artist Michelle Stoney, the artist who created and led the mural for this research project. The ovoid is imperfect; I blur the lines between the different-sized ovoids to show the blurred lines between human, spirit, and cosmic realms. There are pieces of medicine in the dark part, showing the gifts that have been shared from the spirit world and how we try our best to use them and honour the spirit world by burning the medicines, praying and giving thanks.

The pieces of medicine on the painting are from the medicines we used for the bundles. I wanted to connect the actual material we used for the workshops in this art piece so I have a physical piece I can hold onto that represents the significant impression that the youth, Michelle, the teachers, and the community involved have had on me. It represents the magic of our culture, the gifts from creation, and how the students are connected to that magic and the spiritual realm, it honours their power that is witnessed by the stars in the sky.



Figure 13. Ovoid art piece by author. (photo by author)

Shrine

Recently in feeling and thinking with community about ever rising settler colonial violence, specifically in the context of solidarity with the Palestinian people during the most recent attempt of genocide by the state of Israel (Desai, 2021; Salaita, 2017), I had a phrase stuck in my head. It was very gentle but said with conviction and emotion: “we feel for you, our hearts break with you, we are with you, we are with you.” In connection with global resistance efforts, the Indigenous peoples of Palestine, and Indigenous peoples around the world, have supported each other in decolonization (Desai, 2021; Salaita, 2017). In this moment of global solidarity with Palestine, myself and my kin are engaged in resistance efforts – both publicly and privately. In the returning moments when I heard this message, I felt it in my body, and I listened to the voice, and I realized that I recognized it but I couldn’t quite place it. After hearing the voice and the message over and over in my head, I remembered that these were the words of my late Grandpa Fred Wale, that I heard in a video documentary of an Anglican Church Native Convention: *Dancing the Dream* (1993). He is recorded saying this when the Native attendees took over the convention and started an open mic for survivors of IRS to share their stories. He was addressing the other survivors in the room, he also said “I don’t know what we are going to do with the hurting that is inside us” – these words have stuck with me, and I believe that in my political work, activism, academics, community organizing, these words have been a compass and a grounding, reminding me of the lineages of care and resistance that I hold.

As I have discussed above, this research project existed for me in an intimate sphere, it was challenging in some ways because of anxiety or nervousness, but it was also powerful, generative, and moving. As I continue my work in community, now as a mental health counsellor and researcher, I carry this complexity. I am reminded over and over to source an

outlet for the suffering that I witness and feel in the world. Through cathartic ceremony, I release and make space for abundance, love, care, and possibilities for fearless Gitxsan futures.

This voice that came to me during a challenging time served as a reminder for me to pray to and be with my spirit family, to honour them and bring them with me into the dark. I created this shrine as an altar for my prayer and ceremony that anchors me in my gifts and in my purpose. I have used colours and contrast to obscure earthliness of my ancestors pictured, those spirits that guide me were people with complex lives, and there are no such things as “saints” – therefore I honour this by invoking colour and contrast that can come across as unsettling and non-human, yet still sacred. The best of these ancestors guide me, no longer burdened by systems that were created to destroy them; they show up to help me in who they wanted to be, their best and most loving truest selves.

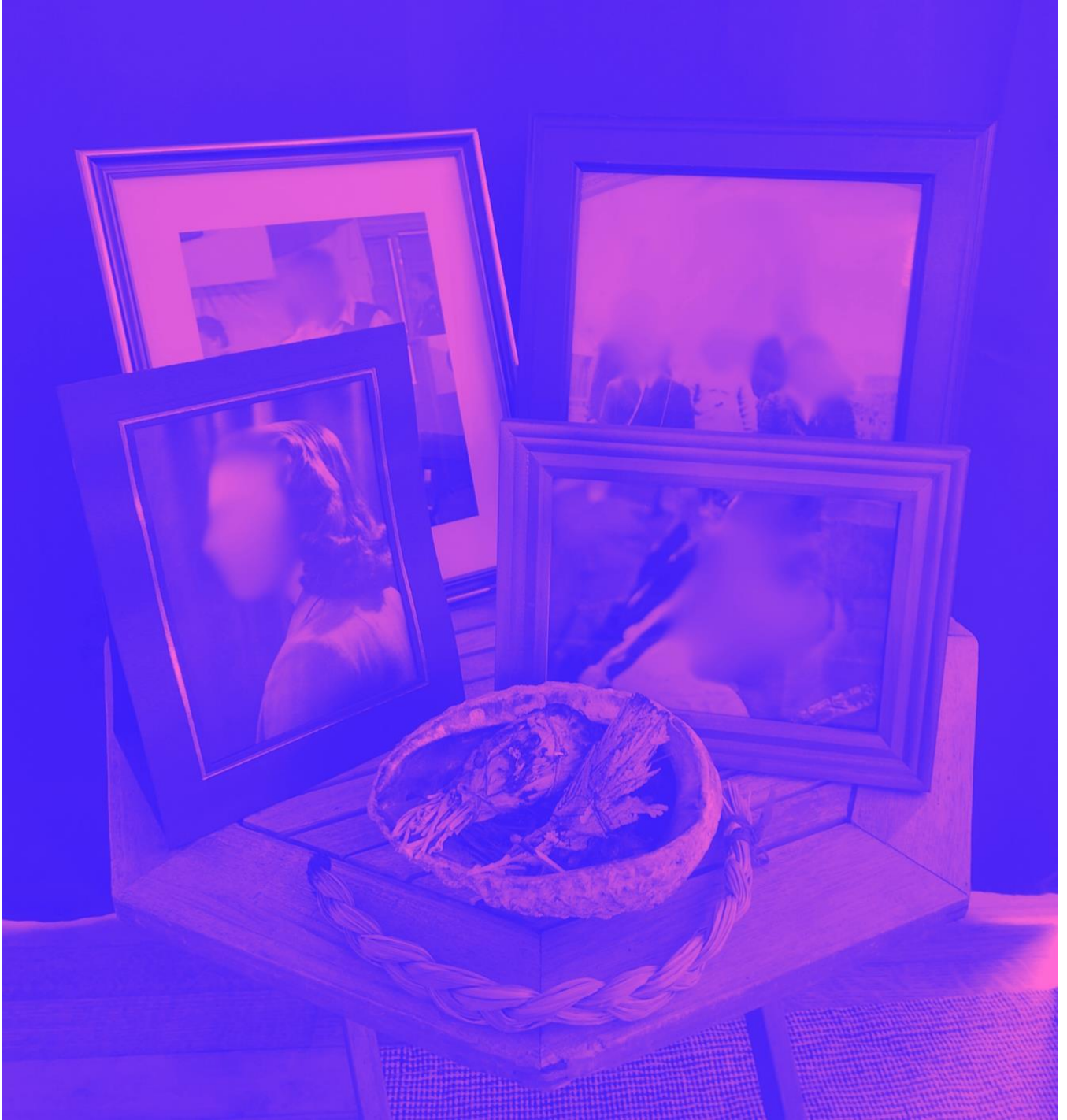


Figure 14. Shrine art piece by author. (photo by author)

Spiritual Processes

I connect to my spirit kin through prayer, meditation, and ceremony. Reiterated by Dr. Jane Smith, as noted in previous chapters: having your spirit right and taken care of is the first step of our work as Gitxsan (Smith, 2000). These practices allow me to deepen into a connection with spirit and divinity that are constantly at our fingertips if we allow ourselves to join their current. Through calling on spiritual guidance, I am able to show gratitude and trust to my spirit kin and spend time asking questions and reflecting on the answers shared. This is a meditative practice in which I use fire (a candle, or burning medicine), soft sounds, and envisioning to align with the path I am being guided on.

These connections allow me to extend welcomes into my dreamscape, for guidance and support in the realm of dreams and subconscious reflection. In ceremony guided by Gitxsan elders, I have been able to go beyond my human form and visit with spirit in the dark and uncomfortable sacredness of ritual. Following the lunar cycle, I provide offerings, burning medicines and honouring the coming and going of astral cycles and their blessings to us. Following the lunar cycles allows me to anchor in bi-weekly ceremony, summoning connection with our outer-worldly relations and guides. These domains of spiritual landscapes have supported my work and my wellness, have expanded my ability to hold the complexity of horror and hope, and have given me the opportunity to leave the burden of the human experience in moments to gather perspective and honour my place along the long road of Indigenous care, resistance and love.

Conclusion

I share my artistic and spiritual practice so as to not betray the unbound, messy spiritual and metaphorical processes that truly surrounds and holds me in all that I do, including my research and community work. This research project has allowed me to reflect on knowledge production, where and when it matters, and ask, who does it belong to and how can we hold and honour it?

Sharing my artistic and spiritual process has allowed me to show some of the influence of the unknown, the work that goes on behind the spiritual curtain and how I call on that and play with that so that I don't lose my mind trying to fit into an academic tradition that tries to erase the ugly, messy, fun, beautiful and intangible parts of Nativeness.

Chapter Four

Discussion on Resistance-Based Research and Practice

I want us to set the standard for judging our brilliance, our beauty and our passions.

Maracle, 1988, p. 17

Here I discuss resistance-based and liberatory care with Indigenous children and youth and the implications of a decolonial ethic in research. In conversation with other anti-colonial scholars, I explore therapeutic discourses that embed liberation and community wellness within approaches to care work with Indigenous youth.

Felt Gitxsan Values and Principles In Research And Community Work

The Gitxsan feast system, Liligyet, operates as a governance practice that ensures important work is witnessed and ratified through Gitxsan law. The act of witnessing within our Liligyet shows the importance of accountability and care that must go into work being done to maintain the Gitxsan way of life. No important work is done in isolation, there are always many eyes on the work to ensure protocols are followed. Warning stories of how to treat guests at the Liligyet are performed, which shows the importance of remembering Gitxsan laws and protocols (Beynon, Halpin & Anderson, 2000). Teachings and protocol that are exhibited during Liligyet and surrounding Gitxsan processes, which I have received from elders in my community, have guided me on how to walk in this life, and subsequently how to carry myself in my research and community work.

Furthermore, a cyclical moving relationship between creation and destruction is embedded in Gitxsan worldview and is relevant across space and time. These instructions and lessons, embedded in stories, songs, and dances, are extremely important and relevant to today's

political and social landscape. If Gitxsan people do not follow the laws which are based on basic respect for all beings, creation enacts restitution. We are not, as academics within settler colonial institutions, trained to ensure we remember the webs of relationship we are accountable to, that we are always in a sacred movement with. Academia encourages individualism, especially among people being oppressed - this makes it more critical that we orient towards our own (Indigenous) systems of accountability and responsibility.

A key take-away from this project is the necessity of allowing myself to show up as part of the web of connection in the research and community work. The care and respect I need to show myself to ensure my intentions are aligned, positive and generative has proven to be the necessary starting point of any good work. During her research and scholarly work, Jane Smith had a process of cleansing herself to “strengthen [her] spirit” to align with good intentions and spirit helpers. She explains her process:

to begin this study, I needed to strengthen my spirit. I began by smudging my head and heart with malwasxw, a sacred root used by the Gitxsan for this type of ceremony. I then journeyed to the wilderness to burn tobacco and food to feed the ancestors of the land. I also sang the limx’ooy’ from the House of Wii K’aax. This is the way in which Gitxsan show respect to those in the Spirit World. As I gave my gifts, a squirrel came over to investigate and an eagle flew above me. I took this as a sign that I would not be alone on my journey (Smith, 2000, p.12).

Contrasted to settler colonial methodological approaches, drawing on Gitxsan process allows the work to be non-hierarchical; it acknowledges the particular positions we take in our community and how that limits and instructs how we show up. Following Gitxsan values and principles honours the ways of knowing and being which have and continue to be attacked by

Canada. My approach to the work with Gitksan youth gave me the opportunity to practice these ethics and bring these teachings into material through our processes and our vision for the workshops, mural and feast. This methodology, and what I witnessed being created in this project, upholds and engages with Gitksan knowledges to imagine and create Gitksan futures, it refuses recognition politics as much as possible and orients towards futures where settler colonial worldviews no longer dominate and cause harm. My hope is that through engaging with the question we proposed in our workshops, the students could experience in moments the power and love of their families and communities, which is connected to generations of resistance and pride.

Liberatory Oriented Research and Practice with Indigenous Youth and Communities

A liberation orientation in our research and community work allows for us and our communities to resist dominate narratives of pathologization and reclaim ourselves in acknowledging how we have been forced to survive systems of violence does not define us or our futures. I witnessed this reclaiming process emerging in how the children and youth showed up in the project, both in their own vision for their school and community, and in how they were uplifted and mentored by the older generations from the school and community. Clark the frames witnessing of Indigenous girls' stories as "essential partners in their resistance." (2016, p. 53) while noting the importance of caring for ourselves in this work. They ask:

What is my own story of resistance? Who has been the witness to my stories, to my truth telling, to my disclosures? What did I need? What have been my ways of resisting across the lifespan, and in different roles and relationships? What is ethical witnessing? Since there are witnesses to violence and abuse who do nothing to intervene, how do we not

replicate this harm in our work with girls? How do we not create more harm through enacting colonial processes of reporting? What is it to move towards embodied relational and reflexive listening/witnessing? How are the stories of girls affecting my body and my knowing? What is my own embodied experience of witnessing testimony in my family, community, and culture? What practices and processes will support collectives of caring in the work we do with children, youth, and families/communities who have experienced trauma/violence? Who are my support systems? Who do I turn to? Do I belong to a community of caring (Clark, 2016, p.58)?

The collective care and reclamation that I witnessed taking place among the youth, staff, community members and my own family, was absolutely a process of creating what Clark calls a “community of caring.” In “witnessing testimony”, we all became part of a powerful circle of reclamation and care. This ethic of care was at the centre of ensuring that the children and youth in this project were honoured for sharing their stories and ideas with our team, their school, and their community.

Upholding teachings of inter-generational care and witnessing stands in sharp contrast to dominant ways of researching and practicing with Indigenous youth that tend to amplify trauma, brokenness, and top-down interventions (Tuck, 2009). As a community-based researcher and counselor, I have seen how these programs can amplify harm as they seek to put out the fire of resistance and self-determination. In another article, “Shock and awe: Trauma as the New Colonial Frontier,” Clark discusses the ways that narratives about Indigenous girls being prone to trauma and Indigenous girls’ being “at-risk” feed the pervasive colonial policies and systems which aim to medicalize and pathologize Indigenous girls. Clark emphasizes the need to dis-embodiment trauma and colonial violence from Indigenous bodies and place it within the systems

and structures of settler colonialism and gender-based violence. Clark then calls on us to decolonize trauma work, insisting on a different approach to addressing colonial violence that permeates Indigenous communities. Clark insists on programs that “resist medical and individual definitions of trauma, and instead use an Indigenous wholistic, or intersectional framework that assist girls in understanding and locating their coping as responses to larger structural and systemic forces including racism, poverty, sexism, colonialism and a culture of trauma” (Clark, 2016, p. 8).

Clark’s work on intersectionality and resistance as a framework for healing is shared by non-Indigenous therapist and academic Vikki Reynolds. Reynolds’ article, “Trauma and resistance: ‘hang time’ and other innovative responses to oppression, violence, and suffering”, defines settlers’ roles in justice seeking as bearing witness to the stories of children and youth affected by settler colonization and white supremacy. Reynolds witnesses’ resistance, rather than pathologizing BIPOC youth who have had experiences with systemic and structural oppression, explaining that “witnessing” resistance in BIPOC children, youth and families is integral to promoting healing and even survival. Further, Reynolds claims that “a witnessing approach requires that we situate personal suffering in its sociopolitical context and resist the individualisation and medicalization of suffering” (Reynolds, 2020, 347). This approach counters the pathologizing of BIPOC children and youth who experience harm and adverse childhood experiences due to settler colonialism and white supremacy (Reynolds, 2019). In this research project, we asked questions that allowed the students to draw on their experiences of power and agency within themselves and their communities, witnessed by us and by their peers. This approach is similar to Reynolds as it evokes dignity and celebrates inner resources, rather than pathologizing trauma or how we deal with symptoms of trauma. Reynolds also identifies as

an activist; in their work as a white cis-gender woman, not only witnessing but calling to action to deconstruct the systems and structures that cause harm to the BIPOC people they work with. This is a very important part of Reynold's work, as they explain that the position as a white cis-woman must be used to foster the goal of freedom and liberation of BIPOC folks experiencing oppression and violence.

The Native Youth Sexual Health Networks toolkit, "You Are Made of Medicine: A Mental Health Peer Support Manual for Indigiqueer, Two-Spirit, LGBTQ+, and Gender Non-Conforming Indigenous youth" also has a section on colonialism and trauma. This section explains that:

Trauma is a body-brain response that results from an event that gives you an intense reaction and makes you feel overwhelmed, often making us feel helpless. Many traumatic events involve a threat to our physical safety, but any event that is deeply painful - emotionally or physically - can be traumatic. Trauma can harm a person's sense of self and sense of safety, and impact their ability to feel or balance their emotions and maintain relationships. Trauma looks different for everyone, and there are many ways to heal from trauma. Trauma happens in relationships and healing does too - this means that while trauma can rupture our relationships and make us feel isolated, healing restores our sense of connection (2011, 10).

This articulation of trauma acknowledges settler colonialism as a source of violence and harm to Indigenous people and communities, historically and contemporarily. It also addresses the ways on which symptoms of violence can be healed and how we can take control of our lives and learn how to regulate and resist settler colonial narratives about us that don't belong to us. They speak to the ways that the imposition of the gender binary is a violence and harm that causes

suffering, by voicing this gendered colonial violence and where it comes from, they make it visible and creating safety by directly addressing it rather than hiding it in shame. They speak back to the trauma narrative that pathologizes Indigenous people, as explored above by Carere, Million, and Clark: “the trauma that we experience (or that our ancestors experienced) doesn’t dictate our path in life” (2011, 15).

The “You are Made of Medicine” toolkit is an invaluable resource to help folks on their journey of awareness around gendered settler colonial brutality, that manifests in our lives, our families, our bodies and our communities. It is a resource to feel empowered with knowledge and tools to resist colonial notions of Indigenous brokenness, and it give us voice and agency to explore and articulate our own stories.

These articles and projects continue to support and inform my research and community work. They show us that liberatory practices of wellness must take into consideration the nuances of ongoing structural, systemic, and gendered discourses of settler colonial violence. Processes of world building are ever present among constellations of Indigenous peoples and communities, especially among youth. What has become clear in this study is that processes of healing for Indigenous people must be forged outside of settler colonial frameworks and must be critical of neoliberal agendas of Indigenous assimilation and genocide. Variations of healing practices can be pursued to address symptoms of settler colonial violence and assist in embodiment as resistance to ongoing attacks from systems and structures.

Politics Of Sharing Indigenous Knowledge

Throughout this research project I have asked myself what is the purpose of sharing certain information pertaining to Indigenous worldviews and ways of being. I ask, “who benefits

from this” before sharing parts of Gitxsan knowledge or culture, and I am sure I sometimes get it wrong. Yet, I believe the question, “who benefits?” when it comes to sharing our Indigenous knowledges can be helpful in steering us in a direction towards our communities rather than to institution, state, or otherwise settler recognition (Mowatt, 2023). The continuous phenomena of Indigenous knowledge being shared in academic and community spaces with white settlers is ushering in a new frontier of settler colonialism. In my work with white settlers, either in academic, community organizing, and in personal interactions, I see the harm that occurs when they are encouraged to engage with Indigenous knowledge outside of settler colonial analysis and liberation frameworks.

Indigenous knowledges, so graciously offered in recent works such as the wildly popular *Braiding Sweet Grass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, by Robin Wall-Kimmerer and *Held by the Land: A Guide to Indigenous Plants for Wellness* by Leigh Joseph (Joseph, 2023; Wall Kimmerer, 2013) invite non-Indigenous audiences to engage in and with their knowledge outside of place and governance that ties that knowledge to sovereignty. It is also shared with little to no acknowledgment that Indigenous people historically and contemporarily are criminalized, displaced and sometime killed for holding and using that same knowledge. Growing fields of Indigenous research across many disciplines are moving towards practices of knowledge extraction that disjoins cultural knowledge from our political and governing authority. In the field of Indigenous Law, for example, (Borrows, 2018; Borrows, 2019), Indigenous and non-Indigenous law students and legal scholars work to extract and publish Indigenous knowledges to contribute to the growing specialty of Indigenous-infused Canadian legal practice. When Indigenous knowledge is shared in such a way that severs it from its place and people, we must we weary of the implications. This phenomenon is a mirror of how

settler states separate culture, or cultural knowledge, from its people, place and Nation-specific context to de-politicize Indigeneity and to inspire a breakdown of Indigenous nationhood, this is an attack on Indigenous sovereignty and futures (Coulthard, 2014; Mowatt, 2023, Simpson, 2014). These well-intentioned attempts are premised on the myth that if white settlers, and the state itself simply knew more, the violence against our people would end. This myth is dangerous because it buries the real root of the ongoing violence, death, and suffering; the root is the reality that all settler Canadians benefit from the ongoing destruction of our people and our way of life. We must face that reality and be honest about how settler colonial capitalism uses violence, particularly gender-based violence, to attack our governance and sovereignty, to break down our families and attempt to destroy our lives. The state allows this violence to continue by marginalizing Indigenous women and queer folks, by creating conditions that do not sustain life or allow for Indigenous futures (deFinney, 2018; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls [MMIW], 2019).

What is produced when Indigenous people share cultural knowledge that is severed from its explicit connection to Indigenous sovereignty? There is a deepening of dissonance from felt experiences of settler colonialism and realities of settler colonial violence. This dissonance manifests in white settlers having access to Indigenous knowledge that many Indigenous people themselves do not have access to due to historical and ongoing settler colonialism and white settlers engaging with Indigenous knowledge and feeling entitled to that knowledge and absolved from the fact that their existence on stolen land produces ongoing displacement and violence against the Indigenous peoples who lands and knowledge they enjoy. Significantly, this also provides opportunities for Indigenous knowledge to be severed from its political and

governing authority, often at the benefit of white settler's lucrative academic careers, or otherwise (de Leeuw and Hunt, 2018).

Considering the harm I witness when Indigenous scholars and artists offer our knowledge in such a way that ends up aiding Canada's attempts to diminish our sovereignty, I feel called to refrain from sourcing and replicating work that shares our knowledges outside of its context in and with place, governance, law, and its people. Therefore, I work to facilitate my own learning of our Gitxsan cultural and political knowledge, and to create opportunities for knowledge sharing through projects that include concrete actions and benefits for and by community. Given the risk of appropriation, re-traumatization, theft of knowledge, recolonization in both research and practice, these commitments are at the center of everything I do as an Indigenous activist, scholar and practitioner. I have tried my best to refrain from sharing cultural knowledge in this dissertation that was not completely necessary to illustrate my process and who I am in relation to this work. I would encourage other BIPOC scholars to resist this phenomenon by holding close their teachings and knowledge, and instead of putting time and energy into sharing it with whiteness, turn inward to our youth and communities.

Recommendations For the Field

I would love for this dissertation to be a conversation with BIPOC (local and global) people, in our communities, in our diasporas, to work through ideas around our collective wellness and our liberated futures. I hope that first and foremost this dissertation can enter the realm of BIPOC folks in academia or otherwise, to become a part of conversations and queries, their community and world building, and their resistance.

Next, I hope that this dissertation can offer to the fields of Child and Youth Care, Indigenous studies, social work, political sciences, etc. some sort of intervention into how we as BIPOC scholars are expected to perform and produce. I believe that this work contributes to a critique in the areas of child, youth and community studies, health and wellness, social work, and other helping fields; calling into question seemingly harmless approaches to Indigenous youth and community healing, that are so often rooted in neoliberal and settler colonial mechanisms and ideologies that aim to eliminate us. If there is something that people who are of the oppressors, not the oppressed, can take from this work, I hope it is to find your own path of resistance and betrayal to your own privileges that come at the cost of BIPOC freedom and safety. I hope that non-BIPOC people that take up this work can see my refusal to share specifics of knowledge with them, to deny the trend that offers our knowledge for the taking. Handed down from lineages of BIPOC queer feminist artist, scholars and activist, I am called to share all of myself in this work, and I share them as to honour myself and all my relations. I will not section myself off. I share them with the expectation that they inspire others to honour all of themselves, and not to take my story or my parts and say “this is the way to do it” (Hunt and Simpson, 215; Million, 2013; Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983). My intention has been to be accountable and transparent in sharing that the way I have approached this project is just my way and it is liminal and in motion. I come out of this project with more questions than when I started. I do not come out of this project an expert, but I do come out of it knowing more about myself than when I started, and I come out of it carrying precious gifts from so many people, places, and spirits.

Drawing from felt and liberatory processes to engage with Indigenous youth and community around wellness allowed me to remain in integrity and orient myself towards Gitksan

values and principles of knowing and being. Inspiration from feminist and queer Black, Indigenous and People of Colour's works supported me to move and create in a way that refuses extractive settler colonial reproductions of knowledge production and expectations (Carere 2017, Davis, 2016; Goeman, 2013; Hunt, 2018; Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983; Maracle, 1988; Moreno, 2019; Nash, 2019). This process could be taken up by others to feed our liberatory movement and continue to turn away from settler colonial, oppressive frameworks and rules.

Conclusion

Toward Liberatory Research Processes

Within the era of reconciliation and trauma victim as the new “Indian Problem” there is a need for critical inquiry into the healing and wellness frameworks being promoted to as the pathway forward for Indigenous self-determination (de Finney, 2017; Million, 2013). With an analysis of neoliberal approaches to wellness and healing, I have asked how I can do ethical and liberatory research with Gitksan youth around wellness and self-representation that resists pathologizing narratives enforced by settler colonial approaches. This project allowed me to draw on a critical felt Gitksan methodology to guide a community centered research project with 100+ students at NHES to explore felt experiences of protection, cleansing, groundedness and joy through workshops and the creation of the Gwalxyee’erst mural.

Key take aways

The processes of this research project proved to be the grounds (moving and breathing) where good research and knowledge production can live. Drawing from BIPOC queer and feminist intellectual and activist traditions, Gitksan processes, and personal and felt experiences, this project has generated grounds for politicized healing, witnessing, and felt wellness work. These learnings have provided a site for anti-colonial and liberatory reclamation and transformation (de Finney, 2017; hooks, 2014; Hunt and Holmes, 2015; Lorde, 1984; Maracle, 1988; Million, 2013). A felt approach that honours self, relationship, place and spirit can restore humanity in our work, and can assist us in doing good, ethical and liberatory research and practice. We do not owe the institution our souls and spirits, we owe our communities and families and futures our soul and spirit work. Choosing to honour process and ourselves reclaims

anti-colonial ways of being that ensure we move in the direction of freedom and liberation from all forms of settler colonial knowledge and ways of being.

Further, Gitxsan-specific governance processes made possible ethical engagement in our community research. Being aligned with Gitxsan values and processes while conducting this research project allowed for accountability towards Gitxsan wellness and futures that are functioning outside of and contrary to settler colonial manifestations of wellness and futures. Arts-based processes allowed for moments of suspended disbelief, and communication of felt thoughts, feelings and experiences witnessed by each other in the workshops. Drawing on liberatory arts-based methods gives space for entry to discussions of Gitxsan wellness that are accessible and provide opportunity to explore other ways of knowing and being.

When reflecting on the outcomes of this research, an important take away is that knowledge production happens at every stage of the research process and is co-created with youth and lives in bodies and place. It does not need to be extracted for us to be doing good research and producing valuable knowledge. This project complicates normative expectations of research outcomes and knowledge production. It asks, how we can do research with Indigenous youth and communities that allows knowledge to stay, to be shared in community and in relationship, held in place, rather than extracted out of context in accordance with settler academic standards?

In this project, a critical analysis of systems and structures of ongoing settler colonial oppression supported liberatory questions about wellness in research with Gitxsan youth. Liberatory approaches to wellness and work with youth is not only possible, but necessary if we desire to take steps toward safe and loving Gitxsan and Indigenous futures. I do not believe I bring any groundbreaking analysis to the world of anti-colonial and liberatory scholarship with

this dissertation, and I hope that the processes and knowledges that I draw from and honour with this project can be of some benefit to the youth and community that I am in relation with. This is my humble contribution to the work that has been done by so many before me, and I am grateful for those who have left offerings of Indigenous feminist and queer worldbuilding in scholarship and art to illuminate a path for me where all my humanity can be present (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983). I uphold all of those in my community, elders, family members, Wilp members, and the youth, who hold the knowledge and power that moves our world forward, Thank you.

Forthcoming projects

Next, we will be initiating a Gitxsan gender-based wellness research project with youth in the Gitxsan Nation. This project invites high school aged youth to take on roles as co-facilitators and co-researchers and design the project to address concerns and questions in their lives in relation to Gitxsan wellness, gender-wellness and resistance. This project has been co-created with the school and community and is supported by Gitanmaax band, Hazelton High School and has been approved by the UVIC Human Ethics in Research Board. This project will make space for Indigenous youth to guide the vision and dreams of this work, my hopes are that this approach to research and community collaboration can offer a small part in our collective liberation and world building movements.

Aluugoyp'ax: A Window, That You Should Not Trust

At times I feel like I've been shown my family and myself via stories as if I am looking through a window, out at experiences that are in the past, present and in motion. The stories seem to always change. It's like someone asks me to look out the window to see the story of my family and our history and I see blue skies, I see a mountain and a landscape, certain familiar

characters and I can orient myself to where I am. Then later that same day someone tells me to look out the same window and its completely different, stormy, foggy, disorienting, where has the mountain gone, where are those characters I thought I knew? I ask myself, where is the truth, the linear, the containable narrative of mine and my family's story? My own experience of being Gitksan, being in a white body, being on and off reserve, has been an untethering experience, and I think for most of us who do not look away from the brutality that shapes our world, we feel that untetheredness as we fight for our communities, for our families, for creation, for home.

Settler colonial knowledge production promises to provide us a window to look through, to see a truth, to capture an objective knowing (Tallbear, 2013). It promises a window that is trustworthy, if we test and poke and prod, we will find an objective answer to the questions we are asking, we can rationalize away the fog and the darkness and find a stable narrative of home, self and truth. We will see a scene that we can have faith in as "reality". The window I look through doesn't seem trustworthy. It is haunted, by trickster spirits. The art I have played with and been in relationship with, is a refusal to the colonial academic urge to trap Indigenous knowledge and people, to subjugate and render an object. I am offering a window into my research and knowledge production that obscures, that cannot be trusted, cannot be trapped, that celebrates the trickster spirit that moves our world. Everything has spirit that cannot and will not be contained. Through my artistic and spiritual practice, I honour that we can only conjure truth in fleeting moments, we hold it in our hands like holding a fist of water.

Dream Work

I want to close this work by thanking my community, the elders and family members who have invited me to this path of reclamation, challenge, love and work. To all of those who

have shared their gifts with me, and encourage me to find mine, and to be brave with them. I humbly give thanks to all of creation, everything that ever was, everything that is and that ever will be, my ancestral guides, and my dreams that transport me home.

During my writing phase of this work, I had a dream that brought an ethereal experience and placed me in the cyclical continuum of time and space in the Gitxsan multiverse. In this dream, I traveled through a portal on the ocean floor and visited a Gitxsan village. I sat with peers, some that I knew and some I didn't, and my peers sang their Limx'ooy, which is a grieving lament that is held within our Wilps. They are sacred songs that are not shared publicly unless in ceremony by our chiefs. When I woke up, I drew the dream in my journal; as to recall details, I wrote down the colours/hues of the dream, the textures of the place I visited, the environment as I could remember. I reached out to the people who were in the dream to let them know what had taken place. This dream was a visit to a realm of the Gitxsan multiverse. I saw long houses, people running around, doing tasks and creating materials, a fully functioning village, time felt different. It was very bright, there was yellow grass around, with a woman sitting outside the long house weaving. We huddled close together by a fire as a friend sang, and we sang together.

A Gitxsan future exists, we visit it in our dreams.

Sabax

Appendix A. Letter of support from NHES



New Hazelton Elementary

Box 220, 3275 Bowser Street, New Hazelton BC V0J 2J0
Phone (250) 842-5777 Email: nhe@cmsd.bc.ca

April. 28, 2022

Dear UVic Human Research Ethics Committee,

New Hazelton Elementary School (NHES) extends our full support of the Kinship Rising Research Project in their collaboration with NHES and local Gitksan artist, Michelle Stoney. We endorse the facilitation of voluntary youth-focused healing and art workshops with our students and community members, with research data collection conditional upon consent of participants.

NHES is an elementary school in New Hazelton, B.C., and part of School District #82. The school serves students in the Hazelton area, and many of its students are Gitksan. Our role as a collaborator in this project is to facilitate the opportunity for our students to engage with the planned workshops and mural process. We are eager to work with Kinship Rising and facilitate ongoing decolonization and opportunities for healing and cultural revitalization among our students.

Text

We will support Kinship Rising workshops by coordinating with kinship facilitators to host 3 voluntary workshops for our students, including arts-based healing workshops and an envisioning workshop to inform the mural process. NHES also commits to paying for the cost of installation and maintenance.

The timeline for this project is May 2022 to Dec 2022, which includes the celebration ceremony for the mural. We agree to host the Kinship Rising team and assist in their workshops and mural creation with our students. We have a staff committee, including teachers and First Nations support workers that will work with the Kinship team to ensure the success of this project.

NHES supports the partnership with Kinship Rising and welcomes youth healing work in our school and our community as a whole.

Should additional information be required, please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Jan Thorburn
Principal

Appendix B. NHES project on Kinship Rising Website

<https://onlineacademiccommunity.uvic.ca/kinshiprising/gwalxyeeenst-new-hazelton-elementary-school-mural/>

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