

Revitalizing Hupačasath Navigational Knowledge: Mapping the Waters of Settler Colonialism
Using a Critical, Coastal, Community-Based Consciousness

By

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We acknowledge and respect the Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees and Xʷsepsəm/
Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Ləkʷəŋən
and ƳSÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to
this day.

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Abstract

I'm the great granddaughter of a hereditary chief, the granddaughter of a residential school survivor, the daughter of a residential school survivor, and the daughter of a mother who was part of the first wave of native women lawyers in the country as well as an elected Indian Act Band Council Chief. In my life, I carry the things that have been passed down to me throughout the generations, and I also carry the emptiness and pain of the things that weren't. Growing up on the Hupačasath, I witnessed multiple forms of governance, leaders, and chiefs. I saw our hereditary governance in practice alongside my mother as the elected chief of our nation. I was at meetings for modern-day treaty negotiations with other Nuučaañuł Nations; I saw native nationalism shift and change through attending native political meetings at the AFN, BC, and First Nations Summit meetings. And one of the places where I learned the most was at family dinner tables. I grew up in a really special family of strong, vocal, passionate folks who have immense love for our people. My entire life, I've watched most members of my family spend their lives working for the continuation of our nations and the strength of our people in lots of different ways. Things in our lives at every level were talked about: last week's band meeting, the upcoming AFN AGM, *Delgamuukw*, the *Haida Case*, UNDRIP. Something was always going on somewhere, and my family was discussing it in depth around dinner tables.

My lived experience and academic training have provided me with the foundation for the creation of the Critical Coastal Community-based Consciousness, which I designed to help me better understand how settler colonialism functions in relation to myself. To do this, I attempt to map out the Hupačasath and Hupačasath First Nation in an ocean of settler colonialism by revitalizing our navigational knowledge to guide my decolonial praxis.

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Dedication

This dissertation is for my son, nieces, nephews, and those yet to come. May you feel my love for you and our people in every page. Don't be afraid to be your whole selves, and use the power of your voice and existence to crack the foundations of settler colonialism.

Acknowledgements

I have chosen to keep this section mainly centred on academic acknowledgements, but to my family and friends, I love you all and you are woven throughout this dissertation. Also, thank you to all of the lands that have allowed me to work on this dissertation upon them.

Christine and Jentery, I don't even begin to know how to express my gratitude for you both. I have a million thank you's for each of you, but I will name just a few here. Thank you for standing by me through all the places we willingly and unwillingly ended up on during this journey. I'm so grateful for the grace and space you both gave me to grow and change as an artist, academic, and person who become a mother throughout this. I am extremely proud of what I have created with this dissertation, and I cannot thank you enough for your belief in me and my work. It would not have been possible without the two of you. You allowed me to dream and imagine and reimagine what could be, and it was the greatest gift. Thank you, thank you!

Shout out and thank you: Iain, Sheila, Adrienne, Georgia, Stephen, Kirby, Emily, Jeff T, Arista, Kalila, Amy, Yotakahron, and Colby.

Mom, Millie, and Amber, I would not be who I am without you. Words cannot express my love and gratitude for you. Thank you all for being the strongest and most loving people I know.

My son, you've shown me I can be so much more than I ever thought I could be. I wouldn't have finished this dissertation without you. I love you endlessly.

Estrella, I am the luckiest girl in the world to have you as a friend all these years and through all the places life has taken us. The comic you made in your MA is what made me want to go to grad school. It was so brilliant and powerful, and it made me feel seen. It opened up my mind to what could be possible in grad school and let me dream. Your work has always inspired me to create with my whole self and not be afraid of my own voice. Thank you for being the amazing being you are, and I will always be grateful for our friendship.

In loving memory of Geordie Murray. You loved with the brightest light, and even though you're gone, I still feel that love around me and I know it won't ever waver. I will always love you, even while we're worlds apart.

Revitalizing Hupačasath Navigational Knowledge: Mapping the Waters of Settler Colonialism
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If you come to the shore(s) of a Nuučaañuł nation, you'll likely see two welcoming figures there. One is pointed at the water and one is pointed towards the land. We only ever used to have them for the water because that's how people arrived in our territories. It wasn't until after roads started to be the main forms of transportation that chiefs and elders discussed and agreed to start making ones for visitors arriving via land. I am using the idea of our welcoming figures to provide two forms of information throughout this dissertation. One for Nuučaañuł people and one for non-Nuučaañuł people. So, if there is information in here that feels like it isn't meant for you, it probably isn't. But nonetheless you are welcome here if you come in a good way.

Welcome to sovereign Nuučaañuł intellectual territory; I'm coming to you live from the
Hupačasath rez...

My words dance
across the page
they've been waiting
for you to arrive¹

¹ The poems with no names or citations attached are written by me.

The Hupač̣asatḥ people are forcibly a part of Canada where our people and our lands are subject to ongoing settler colonialism. Knowing this, how do we as Hupač̣asatḥ people understand ourselves as colonized people? The best way I can describe how I have come to understand how settler colonialism functions is that it has created a kaleidoscope we are forced to constantly look through and the images we see are continuously changing. Settler colonialism relies upon the continuous movement of its pieces to be able to tell different narratives to meet the needs to the state at any given time and keep us in a disoriented state that seeks to have us forget who we are. Growing up, I saw the kaleidoscope pieces moving and changing and I wanted to take it apart and understand how it was created by who and why. And why even though we possess ways to see beyond it, we still seem to always want to look through it.

Hupač̣asatḥ and Hupač̣asatḥ First Nation should also be looked at as two different things. The Hupač̣asatḥ ḥaẉiḥ̣ (hereditary chief governance) and our haḥuufii (territories) have existed here since ḡiiq̣ḥ̣muut (time immemorial). We belong to the lands and waters of our haḥuufii. We were placed here by creator, making our chiefs, lands, and waters spiritually based. The Hupač̣asatḥ First Nation is a band recognized under the Indian Act (a racialized Canadian state-created entity). Hupač̣asatḥ First Nation is colonizing and Hupač̣asatḥ ḥaẉiḥ̣ and our haḥuufii are resisting and continuing through colonization, and these two things are interconnected. In this dissertation we will explore this interconnectedness and entanglement of settler-colonialism and our generational knowledge, culture, and ways of being within our nation(s) and ourselves. I will share examples of the specific ways that I have understood myself to be colonized by the Canadian state in a Hupač̣asatḥ context.

I was stitched together in a kaleidoscope of shape and colour
pieces of the nation, before our time, my body is not just mine
you ripped out stitches, changed the pattern
as though I was yours to design

The Canadian state continuously comes up with new forms of settler-colonialism to keep itself alive, and we need to continuously come up with new ways in which to not only resist it but actively decolonize too. The best way we can see beyond the racialized bounds of settler-colonialism is to return back to being on Tupaf̣ (the ocean). In this dissertation, I am asking you to

see settler-colonialism as an ocean we find ourselves in because we as Hupačasath are ocean peoples. While we may not spend the same kind of time on the water as we once did, our people used to be expert navigators, and it is still embedded in our knowledges. We belong on the ocean. Imagining settler colonialism as an ocean allows us to revitalize knowledges and skills we already have. Revitalizing old forms of navigation, and creating new ones, will better prepare ourselves and our nations to survive on and navigate the waters of settler colonialism to the best of our ability. I have created a new form to help us navigate and journey across these new waters called the Critical, Coastal, Community-Based Consciousness (CCCC). Through the creation of the CCCC, I hope to offer more ways to revitalize Hupačasath laws, culture, and knowledge through a decolonial praxis. The CCCC provides ways that allow us to look at ourselves and our world around us in a way that is kehšii (it means take a good look which I also interpret as critical), coastal, decolonial, intersectional, millennial, responsible, local (in my case, rez), poetic, and filled with ʔisaak (respect). Let's kehšii and get our people back on ocean waters, even if it begins through creating conceptual waters. ʔiihakweʔin means going to travel by canoe. Let's go travel by canoe and together we will learn to navigate the ever-changing waters of colonialism using the Critical Coastal Community-Based Consciousness.

The pages after the Introduction are meant to be displayed on a gallery wall as a woven map. Each page of this dissertation is an island located within the ocean of settler-colonialism. I have created a select number of island pages that provide oral history, lived experience, academic context, poetry, and musings to bring certain layers of myself to the surface thereby representing the entangled layers of complexity within the racialization of Hupačasath and the settler-colonial waters underneath. This dissertation is based largely upon the oral history passed down to me and my lived experience, and what is not has been cited with the source. Not centring western academic discourses, and instead placing my lived experience and generational knowledge at the centre, is meant to prevent this dissertation from having a centre based upon whiteness. This dissertation was intentionally designed to have you as the reader question what constitutes legitimate forms of knowledge production and consumption. What I am asking you, as the reader, for in this dissertation is to question what you know and how you know it.

Weaving was an essential part of navigating and journeying across ocean waters. Ropes, clothing items, baskets for fishing, maps, and ʔiicapim (sails) were all woven. My great grandma Annie was an incredibly talented weaver. She wove things in many forms using different materials she harvested in our territory. One of the places our family's knowledges still exist are in the woven pieces we still have that she created. Every colour, every design, and every material choice she made in each piece created layered meaning that has and will continue to last generations.



This is a picture of my great-grandmother Annie Watts weaving.²

As a poet, I am a weaver of words, and as a weaver of words I carry on a generational form of knowledge production and expression. In this dissertation, I am revitalizing Hupačasath navigational knowledge by weaving together different materials, creating new designs, and new maps for us to take as we journey across the waters of settler colonialism. Here I am in front of you weaving what I know.

² Allen, D. *Indians of the Northwest Coast*. Saanichton, Hancock House Publishers Ltd., 1977. My great-grandmother Annie's picture was in this book; however, they did not include her name and placed her picture in the Coast Salish section. We are now Coast Salish.

chieftainships are often passed down to the eldest male child, Mohoyee's son Wilfred was not fit to be a chief, so he looked to his oldest grandson, Dan Watts, and adopted him in our way as his son. He then passed his chieftainship to Dan. Our protocols were practiced and witnessed to seat Dan in this position, and he remained the hereditary chief until his unexpected death. He was recognized up and down the west coast as the chief.

During my great-grandpa Dan's life and the years that followed his passing, many white, patriarchal, cultural, social, and ideological changes were forcibly occurring through the rapid increase of settler colonialism in Hupačasath territory, altering how our forms of traditional governance were seen and practiced by our people and others. Canada intentionally set out to destroy our nations by repeatedly trying to break our governance systems. Our governance systems were so strong that the Government of Canada felt the need, as a part of their colonizing system, to actually ban the potlatch by name in legislated amendments made to the Indian Act in 1884.

My great grandpa Dan was killed unexpectedly when a giant tree fell on him while he was working at his logging job. Our laws state that in a case like this the chief's seat would go to his eldest son, and so the chieftainship was passed to his eldest living son, Adam. Adam also died unexpectedly and neither of his two children, Danny and Nita Watts, were seated following his death as their parentage went against our hereditary laws. Our laws forbid incest and Adam had Danny and Nita with his first cousin, Nessie. In accordance with our laws, the chieftainship went back to Dan's wife, Annie. Annie passed the seat on to my great aunt Jessie. This was all done in accordance with our laws, and protocols were followed and witnessed. My great aunt did not seat anyone before she passed and this seat remains empty. This seat remains vacant even while others claim to be seated in it; however, it is not legitimate. My great-aunt Jessie's children did not want to continue living this way of life. The life as a chief's family. If you're actually from a chief's family you know the immense responsibility it actually is to our people, lands, and non-human beings.



These headdresses represent the hereditary chief lineage of our family.⁴ They come from my great grandma Annie's family, and she came from a hereditary chiefs family in Ucluelet. They represented the merging of two hereditary chief lines through their marriage. In January 2013, my cousin sold the two sea-serpent headdresses at an auction. My family found out about the auction the day it was happening and tried to stop the sale from happening as well as invalidate the sale after the fact; however, Canadian law said that because she was assigned "keeper" of the masks that they legally belonged to her. But, to us, keeper means caretaker, meaning my cousin did not own the masks as none of us do. They belong to all of us and we belong to them. That is how our laws work.

The male headdress mask sold for \$22,500 dollars and the female mask sold for only \$4,000 (Patriarchy anyone?).

If you ever see them anywhere please contact me. My family still mourns the loss of these masks.

⁴ Lavoie, Judith. "Sale of First Nations masks sparks call for better legal protection." *Times Colonist*, Jan 21, 2013. <https://www.timescolonist.com/local-news/sale-of-first-nations-masks-sparks-call-for-better-legal-protection-4575575>

I return to the place the door
once was
cobbling together
my makeshift ceremony⁵

The sale of these masks and the empty hereditary chief seat in my family are examples of my lived reality of consequences of settler-colonialism. I grew up watching our hereditary systems change from one generation to the next. My great aunt Jessie Hamilton was one of the hereditary chiefs of Hupačasath, and my great Uncle Bert Mack was the hereditary chief of Toquaht. They would bring my mom, and quite often my brother and I as well, along when they conducted our governance. They taught us that bringing along family from of all the generations to witness, listen, and learn was how things are supposed to be done.



This is a picture of my great grandma Annie Watts (Jack). She is teaching the younger generations about governance as well as headdress dancing while they were at home from the residential school.⁶

⁵ Yamagushiku, Sho. *Shima*. McClelland and Stewart, 2024. 58.

⁶ Unknown Photographer. *Annie Watts showing Headdresses to kids*. Unknown date. Sayers Family Archives.

You brought me here
to this place
my footsteps feel yours beneath.
I long for you
through layers of creation.
You feel my tears through wind
turning them into
rain falling back upon me.
You bloom flowers in my heart

These days, it seems like every week, a new hereditary chief pops up, including on Tinder LOL. People believe that the self-proclaimed chiefs we have are legitimate because it's all they know. In Nuučaañuł laws, when wrongs were done, they are dealt with immediately. Everything was put on hold until it was taken care of. A good example of this is when something fell off your regalia at a Potlatch. Things were stopped and it was publicly taken care. Nowadays, things are rarely ever done in accordance with these laws and protocols. For the most part, people do what they want. This is why we need to understand ourselves as colonized and why we do the things we do. We either don't know these ways, or we choose not to practice them anymore and there's a big difference between the two.

As part of our potlatches, we have what we refer to now as "curtains," that belonged to hereditary chiefs' families. They used to be carved and painted on wood and were meant to be long-lasting permanent symbols of our governance. When the Potlatch Ban happened and our potlatches had to happen in secrecy, our people started using canvas to create curtains because they could be more easily concealed than a large wooden version.



This is one of the “wooden curtains.”⁷ It’s currently in a museum in New York after being stolen from my family here in Hupačasath during the Potlatch Ban. I’ve always wanted to be able to travel to New York to visit it.

and what if I write of you.

is that more love than you can handle? (Poem by Nayyirah Waheed 135).⁸

One of the places my mom, brother and I frequently went for hereditary chief business was my great Uncle Bert Mack’s house. These visits almost always meant tea to drink and fish in multiple forms. Fish sandwiches, ʔupsq^wee (smoked salmon), and boiled fish. I liked being able to go to these meetings of the chiefs. They always knew what needed to be done and how it needed to happen. I don’t know if I fully understood what was happening when I was younger, but what I was watching was our governance and protocols happen right in front of me. I saw the meetings of the chiefs to plan and prepare for potlatches and ceremonies, and then I was at those potlatches and ceremonies watching it all take place.

⁷ Unknown Photographer. *Painted Hupačasath Wooden Curtain*. Unknown Date. Sayers Family Archives.

⁸ Waheed, Nayyirah, *salt*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013.

Whether we like it or not, the Indian Act has created a legalized and racialized identity that has produced Indian Act cultures that have and continue to dominate over our own. All Hupačasath members know how to vote in our chief and council elections but not everyone knows how our own forms of governance work. We don't have a longhouse anymore, where our governance has always taken place and our community does not know who our hereditary chiefs are anymore. The less people know about hereditary chiefs and our governance systems reflects the shift from our generational chiefs and forms of knowledge and are transforming into a new system based upon colonized understandings and intentions. Basically, fake chiefs having fake potlatches are colonizing our own people. Colonization allows for a now normalized removal from accountability and responsibility and the continuation of our generational ways that truly comes with being a hereditary chief. This is what settler colonialism in Canada has set out to do; destroy our nations, our governance, and our ways of life. It hasn't been fully successful and many things are broken. But our longhouses and hereditary chief governance systems can be rebuilt.

Maps to the Ancestors

In three parts I come here today

My tongue, na Yamequ, a library of stories within stories, of my life and all the lives of my ancestors inside of me they sit thick, like molasses on my tongue

My belly, na Ketequ, where my sacred self is sleeping, where borrowed dreams and my inherited "mana" transmits memories and power through my skin

My head, na Uluqu, I pick up radio frequencies of my other selves, I hear voices of my people in languages that I cannot understand, like waves they roll in and out of my body, my body, this vessel, this canoe⁹

The history of settler colonialism can be traced back the Neo-Assyrians in the 9th century BC, catapulting the rapid expansion of empires in the ancient world (i.e., Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans). The Neo-Assyrian's developed a method of colonization which included the forced deportation and relocation of local populations to prevent revolts of efforts to defend their lands.¹⁰ And then Spain, Portugal, Britain, and France came over to North America and Canada and the US now have similar but differing settler colonialism. In 2021, Adam Barker said, "these

⁹ Sipeli, Peter. "Maps to the Ancestors." *Indigenous Pacific Islander Eco-Literatures*. Edited by Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner et al. University of Hawaii Press, 2022.

¹⁰ Graham, Mark W. "Settler Colonialism from the Neo-Assyrians to the Romans." Page 12.

two enormous nation-states are linked in a destructive dance that reshapes space and time. But this reshaping is neither absolute nor permanent.”¹¹

Settler colonialism exists in many places, takes many forms, means something different to everyone, and is continuously fighting for its survival all around us and within us. Patrick Wolfe (2006) and Lorenzo Veracini (2010) say that settler colonialism is a structure, or system, that the state relies upon to continuously attempt to eliminate First nations whose lands the state desires.

In *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Albert Memmi writes about how racist and paternalist ideology is a fundamental structural component of colonialism. The normalizing of racism, dehumanization, and domination is essential to sustaining the colonizer and colonized relationship to justifying colonialism. You can see the ideology of racism, paternalism, and dehumanization in the Indian Act (1876). Using settler colonialism, Canada intends to eradicate First Nations by imposing white Canadian law, culture, and government over us to acquire our lands. By breaking us down as First Nations Peoples so that we no longer know ourselves or our ways of life and instead want to become Canadians under the law and not Indians with legal rights and title to our lands and peoples.¹²

In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Frantz Fanon writes that colonialism is structured upon and maintained through systemic violence, both physical and psychological, which is achieved through force. Fanon said that decolonization cannot be achieved by working within colonial structures and systems. Instead, the only way for the colonized to liberate themselves is to meet the colonizer with violence in equal measure in order to achieve the dismantling of the colonial system. Colonialism is violent, cruel, and omnipresent. All of these scholars say that nation-states work to dispossess and eventually eradicate Indigenous Peoples and Nations through racialization,¹³ which is the structural element of settler colonialism.

¹¹ Barker, Adam J., and EBSCOhost. *Making and Breaking Settler Space : Five Centuries of Colonization in North America*. UBC Press, 2021.

¹² Throughout this dissertation I will use the term First Nations when I am wanting to use a term that is not defined by the state. It is a term created and used by First Nations people, we are the original people and nations of these lands and have existed since time immemorial.

¹³ I use Indigenous Nations and Peoples here because the scholars I reference are not speaking in a Canadian-specific context.

Let me find the words
to let the water flow through,
change into rain
and come home to you

I wasn't raised as a Canadian. I was raised as Hupačasath, and I am raising my son the same way. I live back here on the Ahahswinis reserve where I grew up, and I am raising my son here. He is continuation of the family of a Hupačasath ḥawit on our lands. Our survival and continuation as nations on our lands is reflective of the failures of the settler-colonial project here in Canada. Ahaswinis, is one of the village sites used by my family as far back as we know. It's also a reserve now, and I was raised there but I don't actually know when I realized I lived on a reserve. Growing up, I just knew I lived on the lands where my family always has we belonged to.



This is the oldest photo I have of Ahaswinis (windy place).¹⁴ This photo is from my family archives, and the oral history behind it is that it was taken some time after the reserve had been established. The Ahahswinis reserve was allotted to us as the Opetchisaht Band in 1882. It was the first of our reserves that was created by the feds. Hupačasath territory is 232,000 hectares

¹⁴ Unknown photographer. *Houses on Ahashswinis Reserve*. Unknown date. Sayers Family Archives.

plus up the inlet and out into the ocean. The Hupačasath First Nation reserve lands amount to 218 hectares. One of the reasons the reserves are some of the smallest on the west coast is because the feds promised continued access to the largest part of our territories, which is the ocean. When the white people started wanting to settle here they also already had lots of experience with treaties and settler colonialism. They arrived prepared. Another reason is that a small-pox epidemic had decimated our coastal populations, and the feds said smaller tribes didn't need big pieces of land.



This photo was taken in the same general area as the previous photo of Ahahswinis.¹⁵ It was taken around the 1920s when my great grandpa Dan was fighting the government's forcible moving of our homes and encroaching on our lands and access to the water. As you can see here, our homes were pushed back off the river to make room for the road and hydro poles. The land was appropriated from us by the federal government to do so. The following text is of part of the testimony my great grandfather, hereditary chief Dan Watts, gave to the McKenna-McBride Royal Commission (formally known as the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs for the Province of BC) in May 1914:

Another thing we would like to have our Reserve resurveyed and new posts put in around our Reserve. We would like to have new posts put in and find out if there are 96 acres here still. Another thing I would like to say about the fishing in this

¹⁵ Unknown photographer. *Houses and Roadway on Ahahswinis Reserve*. Unknown date. Sayers Family Archives.

River (the Somass) here. Many years ago the big men told all the Indians they could fish in this river all they wanted for their food, but now these white people try to stop us. I don't know what we are going to do. We live on our fish—we are not like white people—it is hard for us to get a job here the old people cannot get any job from the white people because they won't employ them. When the young people go out fishing, they give it to their friends, and it the white people are going to stop us fishing with gill nets I don't know what we are going to do—and we dont want to be stopped. We always want to fish. They stop our traps up the river there. The purseine does more damage than we do. Our net is only ten feet wide, and they stop us from using that—and another thing about the hunting of deer and ducks, they told us we cannot shoot any more ducks and deer. The Indians do not go out to shoot everything, they only go out to shoot for their grub, and they kill just enough for their own use. The Game Warden came here and told us we cannot shoot deer and ducks, but the last few years they have been bothering us right along. When we go out we only shoot one or two deer, and when they do get any they give it to their friends and to the old people. We would like to see about it, and want to know if they have the right to stop us regarding the shooting of this game.¹⁶

The McKenna-McBride Royal Commission was a joint federal and provincial initiative to settle the Indian land question in BC. The timing of this commission is important as the last of the numbered treaties were signed in 1921 when First Nations¹⁷ were no longer wanting to sign treaties. The Canadian state had to change tactics to get First Nations lands and the establishment of this commission in BC was a new form of attempted land theft in BC.¹⁸ In response to this, some BC First Nations formed the Allied Tribes of BC to join together and push back against it. My great grandpa actively fought for Hupačasath lands and peoples against the non-stop colonization that was occurring. He knew that non-Hupačasath people have no rights over our lands or our peoples, and this is something that has been passed down to me, his great granddaughter, and I am teaching it to my son.

In my great-grandpa's testimony provided above, he was fighting for our people to continue to fish in the ways we always have and to introduce new methods of fishing into our practices. Today, we are still fighting the government on how big our nets, boats, fishing areas,

¹⁶ "What the People Said: Kwakwaka'wakw, Nuučaanuł, and Tsimshian Testimonies Before the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs." *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1999, pp. 225-226. Brandon University. https://cjns.brandonu.ca/wp-content/uploads/19-2-cjns19no2_pg213-248.pdf

¹⁷ Throughout this dissertation, I use the term First Nations as it is not state defined but a term created and used by First Nations people.

¹⁸ First Nations Education Steering Committee, Learning First Peoples: Resources. <http://www.fnesc.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/IRSR11-12-DE-1920-1927.pdf>

and fishing numbers can be. Growing up, my mom often said, “How do they think they can close a river?” She was referring to the feds further and further regulating how and when we could fish in our river. As I mentioned in another page, a large array of topics was discussed at our family dinner tables, but the most frequent topics were how we were being colonized by the state, by the chief and council, and how my family was or was planning on fighting back and resisting. One legal case I remember being spoken about was *Sparrow* (1990), which was the first case that said we (Status Indians with Aboriginal rights) have a right to fish for food, social and ceremonial purposes, after species preservation numbers have been set aside.¹⁹ The ruling also said that we did not have the right to sell the fish we caught under this right; however, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) was not able to enforce the sale of fish caught under this right, so many First Nations people sold their fish any way.

These sales were famously called garbage bag sales. Following the *Sparrow* case, the Hupačasath and Tseshaht negotiated with DFO for a pilot sales agreement to be able to sell fish without potential legal consequences. It later became known as the Somass River sales agreement: under that agreement, Hupačasath and Tseshaht members could sell fish without legal consequence. The agreement is negotiated every year, and the number of fish to be taken was always set out within the agreement. We sometimes felt we got less fish because of this agreement (in comparison to other nations who did not have this agreement with DFO), but members like to be able to sell fish, so this agreement still exists today.



¹⁹ R. v. Sparrow, [1990] 1 S.C.R. 1075. <https://decisions.scc-csc.ca/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/609/index.do>

Almost every day during the month of July you can drive from River Road, which is the Pacific Rim Highway to Tofino, up to Tseshaht Market, and buy salmon from the back of someone's car or the driveway of their house.²⁰ Garbage bags are still part of many of those sales.

The *Gladstone* fishing case in 1996 was about whether Aboriginal rights gave Indians the right to sell herring spawn, in which the courts found that it was a valid right.²¹ However, in 1996, the *Van Der Peet* case found that selling fish does not constitute an Aboriginal right.²² In 1996, the Nuučaañuł brought a case (*R. v. N.T.C Ltd.*) regarding the sale of fish from Hupačasath and Tseshaht people selling what was considered "food fish" to the local Smokehouse that was run by the Nuučaañuł Tribal Council.²³ This case looked at whether the right of sale was an Aboriginal right and was prior to any cases setting out how to establish Aboriginal rights, and the court ruled that the right to sell had not been established. These three cases became known as the "Van der Peet Trilogy," as they all stated in similar but different ways that selling fish is not considered an Aboriginal right. These are important cases in Aboriginal law since these cases led to the creation of the "Integral to a Distinctive Culture Test," which is used to by the courts to define and redefine what an Aboriginal right is.

The Van der Peet Test, or the "Integral to a Distinctive Culture Test," determines how an Aboriginal right is to be defined. These ten criteria must be met to be able to prove existence of an Aboriginal right:

1. Courts must take into account the perspective of Aboriginal peoples themselves;
2. Courts must identify precisely the nature of the claim being made in determining whether an Aboriginal claimant has demonstrated the existence of an Aboriginal right;
3. In order to be integral a practice, custom or tradition must be of central significance to the Aboriginal society in question;
4. The practices, customs and traditions which constitute Aboriginal rights are those which have continuity with the practices, customs and traditions that existed prior to contact;
5. Courts must approach the rules of evidence in light of the evidentiary difficulties inherent in adjudicating Aboriginal claims;
6. Claims to Aboriginal rights must be adjudicated on a specific rather than general basis;
7. For a practice, custom or tradition to constitute an Aboriginal right it must be of independent significance to the Aboriginal culture in which it exists;

²⁰ Sayers, Alana. *Vehicle with signs selling fish*. 2020.

²¹ *R. v. Gladstone*, [1996] 2 S.C.R. 723. <https://decisions.scc-csc.ca/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/1409/index.do>

²² *R. v. Van der Peet*, [1996] 2 S.C.R. 507. <https://decisions.scc-csc.ca/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/1407/index.do>

²³ *R. v. N.T.C. Smokehouse Ltd* [1996] 2 SCR 672. <https://decisions.scc-csc.ca/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/1408/index.do>

8. The integral to a distinctive culture test requires that a practice, custom or tradition be distinctive; it does not require that that practice, custom or tradition be distinct;
9. The influence of European culture will only be relevant to the inquiry if it is demonstrated that the practice, custom or tradition is only integral because of that influence;
10. Courts must take into account both the relationship of Aboriginal peoples to the land and the distinctive societies and cultures of Aboriginal peoples.²⁴

My mom took this photo below at one of our fish days.²⁵ What you are seeing here is Hupačasat̓ members lining up to get fish in those large totes. Throughout my childhood, my community all woke up before sunrise on Saturdays in the summer to fish together. We set the net, pulled it in, and brought the fish up to the shore together to load into those large totes. The fish was then divided and distributed amongst Hupačasat̓ members. For a lot of years of my childhood, the hill everyone is standing on in the photo wasn't paved. It was a steep dirt embankment that quickly turned into mud, and you pretty much risked your life to haul your fish up to the top every time. For a number of years, we also used old burlap potato sacks to carry our fish home in. I still remember the smell of burlap, fish, and mud.



²⁴ R. v. Van der Peet [1996] 2 SCR 507 <https://decisions.scc-csc.ca/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/1407/index.do>

²⁵ Sayers, Judith. *Hupačasat̓ Fish Days at Paper Mill Dam*. 1990s.

The rain has
been falling
in my mind
turning my heart
into rapids

Two decades later, in my adulthood and my son's childhood, we now pick up our fish out of the back of a truck in the band office parking lot. People don't want to fish themselves anymore. I still teach my son how to clean and prepare fish in all the ways that my family has taught me, even if it did come from the back of a truck in a parking lot.



One of my exes once came to pick me up at the sea plane where he brought me salmon wrapped in paper like a bouquet.²⁶



This is a from the new show *North of North*, and if you haven't seen it you're missing out.²⁷

²⁶ Sayers, Alana. *Smoked Salmon*. 2021.

²⁷ North of North. "Listen to your elders," Facebook. July 28, 2025.

https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=122139825350668972&id=61570069173451&mibextid=wwXlfr&rdid=JJ9bn7sD1inf3AIY

Natives Wanted

Do you still hunt and/or gather?
Continue to use plants for healing?
Do you have a dying language
and live in a remote corner
of an island or a rainforest?
Have you contracted foreign diseases
and are now facing cultural extinction?
Do you consistently reject the teachings
of missionaries and settlers?
Do you still chant, sing, and/or dance
as your ancestors did? Do you continue
to revere and/or worship your ancestors?
Do you still wear traditional attire
(i.e. loincloths, feathers, animal skins
or fur, bark cloth, leaves, etc.)
and/or pierce and/or tattoo and/or scar
any part of your body? Have you
maintained your oral traditions
and thus, received sacred knowledge
passed down for at least 5 generations?
Do you now or have you ever
practiced human sacrifice and/or eaten
your enemies (or your friends/family)?
Do you have a long history of burying
priceless treasures with your dead
and still know where they're buried?

If you can answer “yes” to 3 or more of the above questions, then you are an ideal subject of study for anthropologists, archaeologists, pharmaceutical companies, natural historians, museum curators, colonial writers, missionaries and tourists.

Disclaimer: Compensation for all sacred artifacts and knowledge may be promised though generally not guaranteed. Side effects of study may include (but are not limited to): dispossession, displacement, more diseases, chronic colonization, exploitation, diabetes, alcoholism/drug abuse, severe depression, paranoia, spiritual crisis, and xenophobia.²⁸

²⁸ McDougall, Brandy Nālani. *The Salt-Wind, Ka Makani Pa‘akai*. Kuleana ‘Ōiwi Press, 2008. 51.

Ahousaht Indian Band and Nation v. Canada is a complex case that I will do my best to summarize from reading the rulings, being in the courtroom, and having on-going conversations had with family throughout. This case went on for 12 years and went to the BC Court of Appeal on multiple occasions. This case happened in two phases as will be described below. In 2009, almost all of the Nuučaañuł Nations began this court case together; however, the court said that nations with on-going overlap issues could not proceed, so only five nations were able to proceed in this case. The Nations that were able to proceed here, Ahousaht, Ehattesaht, Hesquiaht, Mowachaht/Muchalaht, and Tla-o-qui-aht. This exclusion was discriminatory in nature because overlap issues don't impact our Aboriginal fishing rights. It was just a state-created barrier to minimize the power of a united Nuučaañuł. Because Hupačasath First Nation has overlap issues with several of our neighbors all of us became ineligible to remain a part of this case. However, this case impacts everyone with an Aboriginal fishing right. In phase one, the Nuučaañuł brought this case forward to fight for the right to sell any species of seafood and the judge ruled that the Nuučaañuł do have the right. The final ruling about this finding also stated that Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) regulations infringed upon our Aboriginal fishing rights, and the judge ordered the DFO and the Nations to remedy this infringement through negotiations. These negotiations were not successful, and the Nations took DFO back to court over these failed negotiations.

In phase two, the Court of Appeal in 2011 and 2013 upheld the original ruling that Nuučaañuł do have the right to sell every species of fish except geoduck. The reasoning for this change from the original ruling was because there was insufficient evidence proving geoduck was a species we harvested or traded prior to European contact. This case also ruled that any of these species had to be caught within a nine-mile radius offshore. This nine-mile radius was a new state-created infringement on our Aboriginal fishing rights. I was in the court room listening to this case, and at one point the feds' lawyer said to the judge, "Their inherent right to nine miles," and the judge goes, "Their inherent right to nine miles? They've traditionally only fished within nine miles?" The feds' lawyer had to restate his claim, but it shows how even white people can't keep settler-colonial narratives straight, and they're the ones making it up as they go along.

In 2018, at the Supreme Court of BC, Madam Justice Humphries further diminished our Aboriginal fishing right by stating that we could only have an "artisanal, small scale" fishery "using small, low-cost boats with limited technology and restricted catching power." In 2021, the BC Court of Appeal rejected many of the courts' previous rulings that narrowed an Aboriginal right and said the lower courts did not have the authority to make those rulings. The judge specifically said that courts cannot lock First Nations in a past state of existence when defining an Aboriginal right. Throughout this case, you see the racism needed to maintain the colonizer-colonized power dynamic with the court continuously making rulings that are so outrightly racist and discriminatory.

Being prompted by the courts in this case, the DFO has been reviewing the Salmon Allocation Policy (1999), which has been under review since 2019, and First Nations, the Sport Fishing Advisory Board, and the Commercial Salmon Advisory board have all been a part of the consultation process.²⁹ In January and February of 2026, angry white sports fishermen have been protesting potential upcoming changes to the Salmon Allocation Policy set to be announced in March 2026.³⁰ Anti-Indigenous racism is the basis to the rhetoric behind these protests fuelled by the DFO's reluctance to fulfil the parameters of the right as instructed by the court.

In *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*, Aileen Moreton-Robinson explains how settler colonialism relies upon white patriarchy to develop new ways to claim ownership over ocean territories by creating national cultures and subcultures to occupy them. For example, the Australian beach (think surf and lifeguard) culture is central to Australian nationalism because depicting white, blonde, muscley men on surfboards or as lifeguards erases the Indigenous Nations' continuation on their territories. It also creates a romanticized narrative in which the white, male, beach body represents Australia, and it upholds the patriarchal, racist, and capitalist foundations of settler colonialism. This beach culture normalizes daily acts of white possession over Indigenous lands. Here on Vancouver Island, our equivalent is fisherman and fishing culture. Right now these fishermen are very publicly showcasing the ownership they believe they have over salmon and First Nations' water territories in very entitled, public, and racist ways. As Moreton-Robinson explains, these logics show how deeply rooted and essential the continuation of anti-Indigenous racism is in these settler-colonial cultures upholding Canada's claims of ownership over First Nations' lands and waters.

In the 90s, we had a miiat ceremony here on Ahahswinis along the river. Miiat is a ceremony that welcomes home the salmon. It's supposed to happen every year but its only happened that one time in my life because settler colonialism has changed our relationships to the waters and the water beings. Maybe because we're too busy in court fighting for the right to fish or pushing back against the racism and entitlement of the commercial and sports fisheries demanding we get less and they get more. Below is a photo from that miiat ceremony.³¹

²⁹ Fisheries and Oceans Canada. "Pacific Salmon Allocation Policy." *pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca* <https://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/consultation/smon/sap-prs/index-eng.html>

³⁰ Stoltz, Dean. "Nuu-Chah-Nulth alleges racism in fight for new fishing rights." *Chek News*, Feb 4, 2026. <https://cheknews.ca/Nuučaañuł-alleges-racism-in-fight-for-new-fishing-rights-1303751/>

³¹ Unknown photographer. *Mii aht Ceremony at Ahahswinis*. Unknown date. Sayers Family Archives.



In these pages are the court cases Nuučaañuł nations have undertaken to continue to fight for our people to continue to fish in our waters. Just in my lifetime because of court cases like these I have seen our fishing change because of the continuous construction and reconstruction of what an Aboriginal fishing right looks like. I heard stories around my family dinner tables about these cases as they were happening and the implications of rulings that followed. My mom was educated as a lawyer, and her legal analysis of events always provided my family and I in-depth understandings of things such as this. I have also seen the types of boats we can use change, the types of equipment (nets such as drag seine or dip net for example) we can use, how far offshore we can fish, and how our fisheries are regulated. Around 2019, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans also began using drones for surveillance.³² I know about these legal cases (and others) because it matters for the continuation of our ways as Hupačasath people. This need to continue to fight for our lands and waters is a part of my identity and responsibility as a Hupačasath woman: to be able to continue to fish and remain where my ancestors have for thousands of years.

I went along with my mom to treaty negotiations around Nuučaañuł territory as my mom was the chief negotiator for Hupačasath. I remember the white men thinking she was out of her mind for wanting rights to the airspace over our territory to be included in the treaty. My mom

³² Fisheries and Oceans Canada. "Fishery Monitoring Policy." *dfo-mpo.gc.ca*. <https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/reports-rapports/regs/sff-cpd/fishery-monitoring-surveillance-des-peches-eng.htm>

was a big supporter of the modern-day treaties in BC, so I heard and witnessed a great deal about modern treaties growing up. In the early 2000s, the liberal government, led by Premier Gordon Campbell, launched a campaign to stop modern treaties in British Columbia. He brought a court case to stop the Nisga'a treaty from being ratified, and then, in the Spring of 2002, the province of BC held a referendum on treaties with First Nations. Premier Campbell claimed it was necessary to consult with all British Columbians about the nature of treaties with First Nations and did so via a mailed-out ballot with the following questions:

1. Private property should not be expropriated for treaty settlements. (Yes/No)
2. The terms and conditions of leases and licences should be respected; fair compensation for unavoidable disruption of commercial interests should be ensured. (Yes/No)
3. Hunting, fishing and recreational opportunities on Crown land should be ensured for all British Columbians. (Yes/No)
4. Parks and protected areas should be maintained for the use and benefit of all British Columbians. (Yes/No)
5. Province-wide standards of resource management and environmental protection should continue to apply. (Yes/No)
6. Aboriginal self-government should have the characteristics of local government, with powers delegated from Canada and British Columbia. (Yes/No)
7. Treaties should include mechanisms for harmonizing land use planning between Aboriginal governments and neighbouring local governments. (Yes/No)
8. The existing tax exemptions for Aboriginal people should be phased out. (Yes/No)³³

This referendum was a really big deal in my life as my mom led, what ended up being, an international campaign against it. My mom started a movement where she asked people to mail her their treaty referendum ballots in protest. She received tens of thousands of ballots and held multiple public burnings. In one of these burnings, an artist had made a canoe out of the ballots and launched it into the ocean just off the Songhees Reserve near downtown Victoria. My mom then lit it on fire by shooting it with a bow and flaming arrow. Through the First Nations Summit, my mom and other First Nations leaders in the province created a War Council in response. The War Council was formed to protect our sovereign nations and lands from this form of encroachment on our peoples. The Council was very vocal about this being the intent of behind

³³ Treaty Negotiations Referendum Regulation. Referendum Act. B.C. Reg. 50/2002
https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/50_2002_pit

its formation; however, this War Council scared many white folks, and it was actually in the newspaper *The Province*. People heard the word war and drew their conclusions and also refused to hear that, if there was or was going to be a war of any kind, we didn't start it. All at the same time, my mom also got a lawyer to bring a case against the referendum as a violation of our rights, but, unfortunately, the court said that it was only speculative that it could hurt our rights. My mom also travelled to the UN in New York to seek support from an international forum. I remember getting a postcard from her while she was there. I also remember that, at the beginning of all of this, my mom sat my brother and I down and explained what she was going to do, and that asking for ballots to be sent to her was technically illegal, and she may need to face legal consequences for it. She explained what would happen to us if she was hauled off to jail and that she was doing this for the future of our people. I remember I didn't fully understand why my mom could go to jail for having these ballots sent to her but the people who made the ballots could not. And I remember feeling afraid of the power of the government because they were excluded from facing most of the consequences we had to. I now understand this in the context of settler colonialism; however, at the time, I didn't know what it was.

As Aboriginal title remained unresolved in BC and was creating great uncertainty within the province. The BC treaty process was established in 1992 to speed up land claims by making treaties in BC. Approximately half the First Nations within BC entered the six-stage treaty process, and some negotiated as single or collective Nations. During this process, First Nations did not have to prove Aboriginal title to the land; however, fee simple/private lands were only on the table on a "willing seller" and "willing buyer" basis (so no land that was stolen was automatically going to be given back under this process). Two important dynamics of note in this process include that the federal government was responsible for providing the financial aspects involved in this, and the government of BC was responsible to provide the lands and resources. (To no one's surprise, Canada wasn't going to give back anything of course and took itself out of the land equation). The money to have these negotiations was provided to First Nations on a loan basis that would be paid off from the proceeds of any settlement. Perhaps most importantly, in the last stage of the "Treaty" process, there is no mention of a treaty anywhere within the Final Agreements. The Hupačasath Statement of Intent for the BC Treaty process was accepted by the BC Treaty Commission on May 23, 1995, collectively with the Nuučaañuł. Five years later, Hupačasath left the collective Nuučaañuł table and pursued individual treaty negotiations and were also left hundreds of millions of dollars in debt from this process.

I have these vivid memories of being at treaty negotiation meetings with my mother at the hall at Tin-Wis on the Tla-o-qui-aht reserve. The tables were set up in a giant square filling up

most of the hall, so everyone at the tables could face each other. I regularly used to run around the tables carrying stuffed animals and waiting until my mom was done her meetings, so we could go back out to the ocean. While Hupačasath̓ was a part of the Nuučaañuł treaty negotiation table, we travelled regularly to the territories of the other Nuučaañuł nations for these negotiations.

Darrel McLeod was a celebrated author. He was mainly known for his award-winning book *Mamaskatch*. He died while I was writing my dissertation. I have been deeply saddened by his death. In one chapter of his life, he was actually a treaty negotiator for the federal government of Canada. He came to the Nuučaañuł treaty table. He probably saw me running around the treaty table carrying my stuffed animals. This connection in my life still fascinates me because it's not everyday someone was a treaty negotiator for the white man and then goes on to write a novel that really sees you. *Mamaskatch* was a book that hit me like a ton of bricks. I remember where I was when I was reading it, what song I was listening to, and the journey of so many different feelings it took me on. I wasn't expecting it. The rawness, the realness, the openness. The way he described things with a certain amount of detail in a certain way that it made me feel it so deeply in myself. Those moments of colonial trauma that take hold, and you get so used to their existence you almost forget they're there. Because they are just always there. You get used to it as a part of yourself. And then, out of nowhere, you're reading a book and it's like someone just turned on the lights, and you have to see it there still inside of you. The hurt, the pain, the hopelessness you felt growing up that just wouldn't stop. In all the forms it took that you still have hanging around. It's books like *Mamaskatch*, Jordan Abel's *Nishga'a*, and Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* that are why I'm here. They created works that broke through the armour I've welded to my body to survive as a First Nations person in an imperial and settler-colonial capitalist world. It protects you. They see the pain and the trauma because they have it too.

After many years, very few Nations have reached final settlements within the BC Treaty process. The first modern-day treaty in Canada was the Nisga'a treaty, which came into effect in 2000; however, the Nisga'a treaty was not negotiated under this process. In the treaties that came after Nisga'a, Indian rights change in each treaty. Whereas the older treaties in BC have base rights under the Indian Act, the newer ones do not. In 2011, five Nuučaañuł Nations signed the Maa-Nulth treaty. The Nations are ʔukʷaaʔath̓ (Toquaht Nation), Huu-ay-aht First Nation, Ka:ʔyu:k't'h'/Che:k'tles7et'h First Nation, Uchucklesaht Tribe, and Yuuʔuʔiʔʔath̓ (Ucluelet First Nation). It is the first modern-day treaty on Vancouver Island, and the second modern-day treaty under the BC treaty process (the first modern-day treaty was the Tsawwassen First Nation in 2009). Under this treaty, these five Nuučaañuł Nations are no longer considered Indians under the Indian Act. I would love to read about what the reality of these modern treaties looks

like, particularly regarding the realities of existing outside the Indian Act. I think that each nation gets to enact its sovereignty and make decisions for themselves, and I support the nations that have; but I would not sign a modern treaty. The future of our nations is within our ḥawīł and not the Canadian state. Settler colonialism is always about acquiring lands.

The damn you built is breaking
All the rivers, streams, creeks
And oceans you've taken for granted
flow into it
The water is getting too high, too strong
For you to continue to hold it back
My land, My heart
My culture, My people
Are not negotiable
You've never owned us
Defined us, Defeat us
Like you think you have
You can't contain all the water from flowing
Your system is faulty
Once the dam breaks
Let us carry you
Back to where you belong
Let the ocean wash away
All that was never meant to be here

Let's talk about land, #Landback:³⁴ First Nations land is spoken about as Reserves (Indian Act) and haḥuufii (territory)

I grew up in the mountains of our territory. Amongst the beauty and protection of the giant old- growth trees, rushing water in the creeks from snow-covered mountain tops year-round. Throughout the years, locked gates started blocking roads we had always taken, claiming it was private property on crown lands, trying to hide entire mountainsides being clear cut. Followed by wildfires regularly occurring, strong winds reaching places once protected by forests, ecosystems were damaged beyond usability, if not destroyed entirely. The white man changed waterways, animal habitats, and our ability to continue our ways of life in places we always have. I can drive into areas I knew growing up and not recognize anything anymore because the trees and waterways are gone. All of this has happened in three decades. This is settler-colonial violence, and I need you to see that. This violence is the result of white possession and not Hupačasath̓ caretakers.³⁵ This what my son is growing up surrounded by: all that is left from everything that has been taken and we need to remain to care for our lands every way that we can, just as our people always have.

Growing up here, our Elders taught us that our territory is air, land, and ocean. They also taught us that we have been here since ʔiiḥmuut (time immemorial), and we will always belong to these lands and waters. Our territory is who we are as a people. Canadian laws and policies have severely impacted our ability to access our territories, and the restrictions placed upon them has forcibly changed our relationships to our lands and waters. Settler colonialism in Canada is designed to make us to forget who we are and to desire assimilation into Canadian society. In his article "Hoquotist: Reorienting through Storied Practice," Toquaht scholar Johnny Mack describes the lived realities of Nuučaañuł people caused by settler colonialism as hoquotist, which is a, Nuučaañuł concept about disoriented people(s) whose canoe is over-turned. He expands upon this concept to elaborate on how colonialism has impacted our people and the challenges we face in decolonizing our communities. He describes this as our people are now in a place where we can swim back to shore and build canoes to go back out onto the waters. However, many don't know how to build canoes or navigate waters anymore. The white man also provides many vessels equipped with comforts we can come aboard on, and many of us choose to do so.³⁶ Settler colonialism has worked hard to decentre the ocean and our lands in ourselves and our nations, so that the Canadian state can replace that centre with whiteness and a colonized sense of self that is centred around the needs of the Canadian state.

³⁴ If you don't know what #landback is you can google it and then reflect on why you don't.

³⁵ See Moreton-Robinson, Aileen. *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*. University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

³⁶ Mack, Johnny. "Hoquotist: Reorienting through Storied Practice." *Storied Communities: Narratives of Contact and Arrival in Constituting Political Community*. Ed. Hester Lessard. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011. 287—307.

For example, whaling began off the waters of Nuučaañuł territory around the year 1800, and by the 1850s the right whale had been hunted nearly to extinction. And for what purpose? Oil for lamps and sawmills. Once they extracted the oil, they left the remainder of the whale on shorelines:³⁷According to Edward Gregr and colleagues, “Between 1908 and 1967, the BC stations killed at least 24,862 whales that included fin (n=7,605), sperm (n=6,158), humpback (n=5,638), sei (n=4,002), and blue (n=1,398) whales.”³⁸

In *Spirits of our Whaling Ancestors: Revitalizing Makah and Nuučaañuł Traditions*, fellow Nuučaañuł scholar Charlotte Cote speaks at length about how the decimation of our whales forced change(s) in our relationships as Nuučaañuł to the ocean and our water ways and all the beings within them. This had major impacts on our identities as Nuučaañuł as whaling was a central part our way of life. It forced a massive change not only to a food source but also to our social, spiritual, and governance practices. She specifically mentions that while Nuučaañuł took marine-based jobs, there were none who took jobs in the whaling industry because of the sacredness of whales to our people.³⁹

The Nuučaañuł people chose not to whale indefinitely following this massacre of our whales to allow for their survival and repopulation. It wasn't until 1999 that our people were able to continue this way of life when the Makah harvested a whale off the coast of Washington state. The Makah have applied to harvest another whale in the summer of 2025. This practice once central to our people has been forcibly decentred and taken us from our ocean territories. Aquatic animals from our river and ocean waters are one of the main ways we sustained ourselves before the white man came. Settler colonialism continues to restrict and regulate what, when, and how we are allowed to harvest any of the aquatic animals. The allotted numbers of each species we are permitted to take does not allow us to feed our families throughout the year.

³⁷ Coté, Charlotte. *Spirits of Our Whaling Ancestors: Revitalizing Makah and Nuučaañuł Traditions*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010.

³⁸ Gregr, Edward J., et al. “Migration and Population Structure of Northeastern Pacific Whales off Coastal British Columbia: An Analysis of Commercial Whaling Records from 1908–1967.” *Marine Mammal Science*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2000, pp. 699–727.

³⁹ Coté, Charlotte. *Spirits of Our Whaling Ancestors: Revitalizing Makah and Nuučaañuł Traditions*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010.

For those who don't know, processed meat, such as bologna or spam, have become associated with nativeness (especially it being rez) because it cost less and fed more people and, therefore, became a staple food in a lot of households. Following the increasing colonial violence against them, many native folks found themselves living in poverty and needing to provide for their families following the loss of being able to provide for themselves through gathering, hunting, and fishing foods they always had.

from the legends of Juan Malo (a malologue)

(the birth of spam)

SPAM was born on July 5, 1937, in Austin, Minnesota, the home of Hormel (pronounced "Hor-mal," like "Nor-mal"). Eight pounds of SPAM die in a Chamorro stomach each year, which is more per capita than any other ethno-intestinal tract in the world. Guam is an acronym for "Give Us American Meat." Our guttural love of SPAM was born in 1944, when the shiny cans were berthed from aircraft carriers. This fateful day is commemorated as "The Feast Day of the Immaculate Consumption." St. Anthony the Abbot, tayayute [ham]. The rest of the story is gestational genealogy, a delicious cycle. Sadly, military recruiters are now worried that young Chamorros have become too obese to enlist in the armed forces. "Guam is Where America's Impure Pork Products End!" At this year's SPAM cook-off in Guam, my uncle's "Pika Spam Pierogi" ousted my auntie's "Crispy Wonton Spam Ravioli" for first place. He won a free roundtrip ticket to the 14,000 square foot SPAM museum in Minnesota #cubistartyoucaneat. Turkey SPAM, hot and spicy SPAM, garlic SPAM, SPAM lite, Portuguese Sausage flavored SPAM, etc. WSWFJE? (What SPAM Flavor Would Jesus Eat?). My food philosophy is simple: I eat therefore I SPAM. The name itself stands for : Specially Processed Army Meal, Sacred Pork And Medicine, Super Pink Artificial Meat, Snake Pigeon And Mongoose, or Some Pigs Are Missing. At the SPAM factory, nearly 20,000 hogs are slaughtered every day. More than 1,000 severed pig heads slide down the conveyor belt every hour.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Perez, Craig Santos. *from unincorporated territory [lukao]*. Omnidawn Publishing Inc., 2017.

Hupačasath territory is located inland on the west coast of Vancouver up the Alberni Inlet. This inlet runs 54 kms from the Pacific Ocean into the town of Port Alberni. Our Elders always described the river as the wealth of our tribe. Our river has been coveted by neighbouring tribes for centuries. We have all 6 species of salmon in our river. The Elders always said that there used to be so much salmon in it before the white man came that you could walk across the river on top of the salmon. When the white man first arrived, they were not permitted to come up our inlet without the permission of our hereditary chiefs.⁴¹ Our trees were also said to be over 200 feet tall when the white man first arrived.

Every year the storms come. They start in the fall and last until spring has fully settled in. I've always loved storm season. The winds blow in and shake things loose, so it can carry away what does not need to remain. Meanwhile, the fog and the clouds settle in their seasonal home along the coast. When they arrive in October, I welcome them in as kin.

The reserve is a complicated place to be from and to live. Reserves in Canada actually belong to her majesty the queen. Oh wait, it's the old creepy white guy now, his majesty the king. Reserves are held by the federal government for the use and benefit of Indians.⁴² Typically, they are miniscule parcels of land set in areas that were deemed the least desirable by the federal government and are located near or around highways, water ports, and train tracks. Where the feds placed these reserves may or may not be within the actual territories of the nations. The Hupačasath reserves are located in sovereign Hupačasath territory. It may not be considered sovereign under Western understandings of sovereignty, but we have never left nor surrendered our lands. We still live here. My people belong here: we always have and always will. The City of Port Alberni has established itself around us, and the Tseshaht began to settle in our territory in the 1800s too. But my people have been here since ?iihmuut (time immemorial).

We had agreed upon bounds of our territories with our neighbouring nations; however, once Nuučaanuŋ treaty negotiations began in the 1990s, territorial boundaries began to shift and expand. The Tseshaht haven't always claimed Hupačasath territory as theirs. The Tseshaht come

⁴¹ Ross, Vernon. *Affidavit in KE-KIN-IS-UQS, also known as Judith Sayers, Chief Councillor suing on her own behalf and behalf of all members of the Hupačasath First Nation, the Hupačasath First Nation Council, and the Hupačasath First Nation v. Minister of Forests of the Province of British Columbia and the Chief Forester*. Supreme Court of British Columbia, Vancouver. Registry No. L043095. November 2004.

⁴² Indian Act R.S.C., 1985, c. 18-1. <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/i-5/>

from the Barclay Sound area, which is at the entrance to the Alberni Inlet. There is an area there called Tsahah, and they claim it is as their birthplace. The last living person to be born in the Barclay Sound from Tseshaht just died recently. Our Elders said that only the young people who didn't listen to their Elders would claim territory that wasn't theirs. We had good relations with Tseshaht; there was a lot of intermarriage between us, and as such they were given permission by Hupačasath hereditary chiefs to stay in a certain area during harsh winter(s). However, it was always agreed it was Hupačasath territory, and they were there temporarily with permission.

Our Elders also spoke about how there was an influx of Tseshaht who showed up and built homes right next to the Alberni Indian Residential School. The land on and around the old residential school did not become a Tseshaht reserve until after specific-claims negotiations occurred between Tseshaht, the church, and the government. So when you hear Tseshaht speaking about the Alberni Indian Residential School, remember that they own the building and the land now, but it is only a recent acquisition.

Even though there are inconsistencies and contradictions in their stories, they still adamantly claim Hupačasath territory as theirs. They've written Hupačasath out of our lands and their family trees. I like to think that they're just like the colonizers needing to continuously erase the history of the land and people to establish themselves a legitimate here. They pretty much scream it from rooftops or at a recent concert ,LOL. As Hupačasath, we know we're from here, we know we belong here, and we don't need to scream it from the rooftops. Instead, we just continue to live on the lands our people always have. The land knows who belongs to it, too.

Growing up on the reserve, I started dancing our dances from a young age. There's a part of you that already knows the beat and your body knows what to do if you trust it. When activated the dance floor is a space that blurs the lines between worlds where the ancestors are. The beat of the drum connects us with our people across time and space.



This picture was taken at the grand opening of the new Hupačasath band hall in the early 2000s.⁴³ I'm on the far right wearing the black shawl with blue and yellow ribbon next to my aunt Brenda and my cousins. My brother is just left of centre wearing all blue. Tat (Edward) Tatoosh is leading the song in the centre of the circle wearing the cedar hat and red shawl.

⁴³ Unknown Photographer. *Hupačasath People Singing and Dancing*. Early 2000s. Sayers Family Archives.

When you grow up in the mountains of your territory, you end up in different places, at different heights, in different seasons, and every time you see it all in a new way than you have before. When you're up in the mountains the land holds you differently.⁴⁴



If you listen closely
you can hear the poems
being shared
amongst the trees
making me feel known
it's good to be home

⁴⁴ Sayers, Alana. *Looking West in Hupačasath Territory up Alberni Inlet*. 2019.

Tonight's writing is fuelled by red rose tea and siihmu (herring eggs). Every single March of my life, we have eaten siihmu. I used to eat it with my mom and grandma, and now my son eats it with me and his grandma. To me, that yearly crunching sound is Hupačasath.

I live back in my homelands again. It can be hard to live and be at home amongst our people. Anyone who grows up on a reserve knows. For anyone who grew up on your reserve, you know that it's as tough as it is beautiful. Colonization has and continues to change landscapes around us. Geographically and within our communities and ourselves. It's hard being in rapidly changing landscapes like that. Where you see things that have existed since time immemorial, how some of those things have changed and become what they are now, and where you know some have been wiped out entirely. Colonization has created new cultures, new lifestyles, new identities, and new nations and relationships. You're trying to navigate the complicated waters of being Hupačasath in the present. People who aren't from the rez like to romanticize it because they don't know what it's really like.

I grew up in a house that originally belonged to my great grandparents, Dan and Annie Watts. In their generation, they went from living in longhouses in seasonal villages, to the white houses on reserves. This house was located on the south side of the Somass River. The Alberni Indian Residential School was located across the river and a little ways away. It is not visible from the house, but we are acutely aware that it is not far from there. My great grandparents lived here knowing their children were there at that school, just across the river. I grew up there knowing that my grandma was forced to go there, and that my great grandparents had to look across the river every day. My great grandma Annie would sit in the upstairs window that overlooked the river as she weaved.

In early December 2024, I watched that house burn down. On my way to bed, I saw strange lights outside in the window of the front door, so I went to look to see what was going on. When I opened the door and looked outside, I saw smoke rising from the house, and the highway filling with lights from the fire trucks. I got some shoes on and ran next door. When I got there, I stood with my cousin and another woman from Hupačasath. I watched as the house built by my great grandparents, and the house I grew up in, burned to the ground as a result of an alleged feud at the alleged drug camp my cousins have there now. For me, there was so much history and emotion because the fire represented how quickly settler colonialism can burn things to the ground.



I took this picture in December 2025, on my way home from the grocery store in Port Alberni.⁴⁵ It says “fuck natives.” Racism is everywhere, but there is a specific type of anti-Indigenous racism that exists in small towns that are next to a reserve. In these towns, some of these families have been there since white people first rolled up and laid claim to the lands, and they carry deep entitlement, history, and hate for First Nations continuing to exist. I’d also argue here many of them willingly carry deeply embedded white supremacy because it is what they were taught by their forefathers and roots them into the lands they claim.

⁴⁵ Sayers, Alana. *Photo of electrical box with graffiti*. December 2025.



This is my great grandpa Hereditary Chief Dan Watts (far right) and his wolves in the late 1920s.⁴⁶ He is holding a sign that says, “We are the real native sons of Canada.” This is an important picture because this is our hereditary chief governance system standing up to colonization in the moment. This was a float in a parade that was happening in town when more white people were settling in our territory. They were trying to establish themselves a legitimate nation, and my great grandpa, amongst others, were constantly fighting against this by asserting themselves as Nation(s) already here. I grew up participating almost every year in the fall fair parade to remind settlers that Hupačasath is still here and this is our territory. I now do this with my son and tell him we do this just like his great-great grandpa Dan did. This weaves us together: past, present, and future.

⁴⁶ Unknown Photographer. *Hereditary Chief Dan Watts and his Wolves in a Truck*. Unknown Date. Sayers Family Archives.

Eagle Poem

To pray, you open up your whole self
To sky, to earth, to sun, to moon
To one whole voice that is you.
And know that there is more
That you can't see, can't hear
Can't know, except in moments
Steadily growing
and in other languages that aren't always sound
But other circles of motion
Like eagle that Sunday morning
Over salt River
Circled in blue sky, in wind
Swept our hearts clean with sacred wings
We see you see ourselves
And know that we must take
The utmost care and kindness
In all things
Breathe in knowing we are made of all of this
And breathe, knowing we are truly blessed
because we are born and die soon within a
True circle of motion
Like eagle, rounding out the morning inside us
We pray that it will be done
In beauty, in beauty⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Harjo, Joy. *In Mad Love and War*. Wesleyan University Press, 1990.

I am providing you with a few case summaries about land to give you examples of land as a racialized concept (or as Aileen Moreton-Robinson calls it a “white possession”). We all know I am in no way a lawyer, and these interpretations are based off of my reading of the cases and hearing about them growing up with lawyers in my family.

The *Calder* case (1973) found that Aboriginal land rights survive European settlement and remain valid in the present, unless extinguished by treaty or otherwise. This set the foundation for the test for Aboriginal title.

The *Guerin* case in 1984 concluded that the Crown acquired radical or underlying title to land in British Columbia at the time of Canadian sovereignty but that it was burdened by the pre-existing legal rights of Aboriginal Peoples as these emanate from their use and occupation of the land prior to European arrival.⁴⁸

In 1997, the *Delgamuukw* case, a Supreme Court of Canada decision, ruled that Aboriginal title exists and is a right to the land itself for exclusive use and occupation.⁴⁹ This was the first time in Canadian history that Aboriginal title was recognized in court. The decision stated that what makes Aboriginal title unique is that it arises from possession before British settlement as opposed to after. The judgement compared Aboriginal title to fee simple ownership, which is private ownership with underlying crown title, and meant that dual perspectives of common law and Aboriginal rights as well as title bear equal weight in evaluating a claim for Aboriginal title. However, Aboriginal title is held communally, and title continues to be a “burden” on private and Crown land as it is not the same as private ownership and cannot be described by traditional property law concepts. Crown land is not the same as private ownership and cannot be described by traditional property law concepts.

In the *Haida* Case (2004), the Government of BC granted tree farm licenses to the forestry company Weyerhaeuser on Haida Gwaii. The Haida Nation said that the province has a legal duty to consult and accommodate them. The Haida case set the standard for consultation and accommodation across Canada. Prior to this case, the government was infringing on rights without talking to First Nations. Supreme Court of Canada ruled that whenever First Nations rights potentially be negatively impacted upon by development, First Nations had to be consulted. If rights were infringed upon, the appropriate accommodation must be provided. Consent may be

⁴⁸ *Guerin v. The Queen*, [1984] 2 S.C.R. 335 <https://decisions.scc-csc.ca/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/2495/index.do>

⁴⁹ *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, [1997] 3 S.C.R. 1010 <https://decisions.scc-csc.ca/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/1569/index.do>

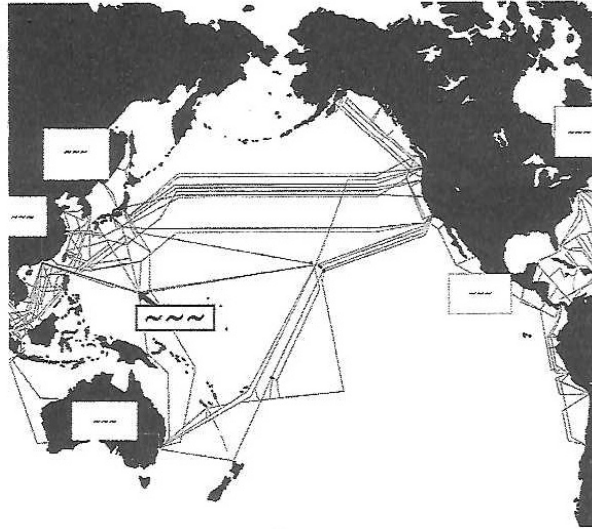
required if rights were to be totally abrogated. (If you were paying attention in BC in the early 2000s, you would know the phrase “consultation and accommodation,” and this is where that comes from!)

In 2005, Hupačasath won a court challenge in BC Supreme Court Against the Minister of Forests for not consulting with us regarding the deletion of TFL 44 from the private lands in the territory. TFL (Tree farm license) are required to log large sections of forest. It used to be a law under the forest act that you needed one of these licenses for both crown and private lands; however, following this court case they amended the act so it was no longer required for private lands, which meant that large sections of forest could now be logged without legally requiring consultations with the First Nations of the land. Settler colonialism will find a way.

Speaking of, in a press conference in January 2026, US President Donald Trump said, “[T]he fact that [Denmark] had a boat land there 500 years ago does not mean that they own the land.”⁵⁰ In this press conference, Trump was trying to create a narrative to justify his plans for imperial expansion through the invasion of Greenland in the near future, but his comment actually shows the falseness and shifting nature of narratives that settler-colonial nations own the lands they claim. (It also shows how racialization includes whiteness and that there is always a hierarchy within whiteness; who is supposed to be the great white today, Donald?). The internet blew up with Indigenous Peoples around the world reacting to Trump’s statement, and the social media posts were equally deeply truthful and hilarious, which showed the continued solidarity and honouring of sovereignty between Indigenous Nations around the world.

Hold me one last time
before I let you go
Now that you’ve broken me open
to see what’s inside

⁵⁰ “Trump: Denmark should not control Greenland just because they ‘had a boat land there 500 years ago’.”
YouTube, Uploaded by NBC News, 9 January 2026, <https://youtube.com/shorts/sle5agKtNyc?si=llJrE-QgBAZ4zFtr>



poemap based on “Telegeography cable network map, 2009,” from “Critical Nodes, Cultural Networks: Re-Mapping Guam’s Cable Infrastructure,” by Nicole Starosielski in *Amerasia Journal* 37:3 (2011): 18-27.

“Undersea communication cables are durable and cost-effective infrastructures supporting the interconnection of America, Asia, and Australia. Many of these cables, which carry almost all transpacific Internet traffic, are routed through the island of Guam. Historically, more cables have landed on Guam than in either Hawai’i or California, two other major hubs for signal exchange.” (19)

There is a submarine cable that runs from Vancouver to Port Alberni and from here across the Pacific Ocean to Japan: the global colonization of Indigenous coastal nations around the Pacific. Maps like this aren’t known or seen by many. Craig Santos Perez calls this a “poemap.”⁵¹

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is woven into my family in a lot of ways. My mom regularly took part in the Working Group on Indigenous Populations that was creating what would become the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Multiple times in my childhood, my grandma and I travelled with my mom to Switzerland and explored the country while my mom worked. When I was a baby, my

⁵¹ Perez, Craig Santos. *from unincorporated territory [lukao]*. Omidawn Publishing Inc., 2017.

mom would walk me up and down the halls of the Palais des Nations, and as I got older, I would run around those same hallways. I also got to meet Indigenous peoples from all over the world. At night, my mom and her colleagues would continue working on UNDRIP, and my grandma and I would join them. In our Nuučaañuł ways, you bring the generations with you where you go to teach them and show them how things are done. My mom always did this with my grandma, my brother, and me. As I got older, I learned more about the history of the UN and UNDRIP through oral history shared at my family's dinner table and attending a variety of other First Nations political meetings with my mother. What I came to learn is the United Nations is an avenue that Indigenous Peoples around the world have often taken in an effort to have their Nations legitimized through international law, as well as a venue in which they would fight for their rights inside and outside of the state. Below is a photo of my grandma Bea, my mom Judith, and myself during one of these trips when I was two years old.⁵²



The organization that preceded the UN, the League of Nations, was formed in 1920, after the First World War, in the hope that it might achieve world peace. In 1923, an Iroquois leader named Deskaheh went in front of the League of Nations to bring a case about all of the issues his people were facing in Canada. He was denied entry into the League of Nations, but the Mayor of Geneva succeeded in setting up a hearing with the support of a larger number of states. In 1945,

⁵² Unknown photographer. *Three Generations of Sayers Women in Switzerland*. Sayers Family Archives.

the UN was formed. In the 1960s and 1970s, Indigenous Peoples from around the world pushing back against colonization began to organize in movements and groups. Some of these movements and groups appealed to the UN, looking for the international community to take action against the ongoing colonization of their peoples and lands by nation states. This pushed the UN to address a multitude of concerns coming in from around the world. In 1972, special rapporteur José Martínez Cobo was appointed to do a special study, “Study of the Problem of Discrimination Against Indigenous Populations.” This study ran until 1984.⁵³ Indigenous Peoples kept pushing at the international level, and in 1977, the NGO conference on the Discrimination of Indigenous Populations in America took place. As a result of this conference, the first international Indigenous document was created: “Draft Declaration of Principles for the Defence of the Indigenous Nations and Peoples of the Western Hemisphere.” In addition, the working group of the UN Sub-Commission on the Prevention and Discrimination of Minorities of Indigenous Peoples was formed. All of these things led to the establishment of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, which in turn created the early drafts of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The photo below is of my mom at the UN in the early 90s working on one of these drafts:⁵⁴



The original draft of the declaration created by and for Indigenous Peoples is very different than the white-washed colonizing version that seeks to keep Indigenous Peoples dispossessed of their lands and sovereignty as nations. Charmaine White Face’s book, *Indigenous Nations’ Rights in the Balance: An Analysis of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, analyzes three

⁵³ Department of Economic and Social Affairs. “Martínez Cobo Study.” [social.desa.un.org](https://social.desa.un.org/publications/martinez-cobo-study). <https://social.desa.un.org/publications/martinez-cobo-study>

⁵⁴ Unknown Photographer. *Judtih at UN*. 1980s. Sayers Family Archives.

versions of UNDRIP and places each version side-by-side for comparison. Below is an example from her book:

“Original Sub-Commission Text PP 12

Recognizing also that indigenous peoples have the right freely to determine their relationships with States in a spirit of coexistence, mutual benefit and full respect,

Human Rights Council Version PP 12

Recognizing also that indigenous peoples have the right freely to determine their relationships with States in a spirit of coexistence, mutual benefit and full respect,

General Assembly Version PP 12

[The General Assembly version deleted this paragraph.]

The wording is the same in both the Original and HRC texts. The deletion of this general Right in the final GA version indicates a lack of recognition of Indigenous Nations’ sovereignty. This very action, in which colonization has attempted to ignore our sovereignty, has led directly to the need to create a special Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Nations. Without the approval or consensus of Indigenous Peoples and Nations, the General Assembly deleted one of the most basic reasons for the need for the Declaration in the first place: Indigenous Peoples’ right to coexist with others. It is a travesty that this Preambular Paragraph was deleted from the text in its entirety” (White Face 23).⁵⁵

UNDRIP was adopted in 2007, and Canada voted against it, so did the other settler-colonial states. Canada officially fully adopted UNDRIP in 2016 (and the term Indigenous was used more regularly until it politically and socially replaced the term Aboriginal). Since then, First Nations in BC have fought to have it implemented. In 2019, the province of BC passed the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act. This Act states that BC will adapt its laws to allow for the implementation of UNDRIP, and it is the first law of its kind in Canada. The Act also states that BC First Nations will be part of shared decision making with the provincial government. In 2021, Canada made the UNDRIP Act a law. Currently, in the beginning of 2026, Premiere David Eby wants to “amend” the BC Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act. It appears by amend he actually means dismantle.⁵⁶ This is why mapping out all of this information is important. It is constantly changing, and we need to be able to find our way through armed with as much knowledge as possible.

⁵⁵ White Face, Charmaine. *Indigenous Nations’ Rights in the Balance: An Analysis of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Living Justice Press, 2013.

⁵⁶ Donovan, Moira. “Reversing course on reconciliation?” *National Magazine*, Feb 2026.

https://nationalmagazine.ca/en-ca/articles/law/hot-topics-in-law/2026/reversing_course_on_reconciliation

Keep a Dime (by Debra Swallow)

Broken Treaties, FBI, What civil rights?!
Trials, Convictions, Appeals, Courtrooms, Truckstops,
Holiday Inns
Endless highways, two bottles of No-Doze
Phone call, phone bills, another pack
of Marlboro Reds,
Sleeping bags, legal pads,
(gotta write tomorrow's press release)
Organizing rallies, slide shows,
Speaking forums, pow wows, feasts,
giveaways, wars,
Another pot of coffee – make it go
please,
Only 80 more miles, who brought the
banners, signs, flags, literature,
posters, pins?
Mailing lists, donations please, we have
A struggle to continue.
Gas money, postage, air fare, cab fare,
printing bills.
Gotta score a tipi, a coleman lamp and batteries
for the \$200 portable stereo.
Teach the children and their parents the
1868 treaty and Lenord Peltier, the IRA-BIA
and summer 49's.
Make a bustle and a roach and
don't forget the deerhide guncase.
Spend your money on the movement
but keep a dime for the phone,
It's worth a lawyer you know.
Women's work is never done.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Swallow, Debra. "Keep a Dime." *A Gathering of Spirit: Writing and Art by North American Indian Women*. Edited by Beth Brant. Sinister Wisdom Books, 1984.

The Indian Act (1876) is the beating heart of settler colonialism in Canada. Canada relies upon the naturalization of whiteness it achieves through the Indian Act to continuously colonize through the racialization of Indians (and now aboriginals and Indigenous). The Indian Act in Canada created a dependent, legal, and racialized collective identity, which was to include all the distinct and sovereign First Nations within Canada, and regulate us and our lands.⁵⁸ Residential schools began operating in Canada starting in the 1860s; however, attendance was minimal, so in the nineteenth century, Department of Indian Affairs Minister Duncan Campbell Scott passed a bill to change the Indian Act to make attendance mandatory in 1920, infamously stated the following:

I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not think as a matter of fact, that the country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand alone. . . . Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department, that is the whole object of this Bill.⁵⁹

Children began being forcibly taken from their families and placed in residential schools. Whenever there was refusal, the RCMP would be sent in to take the children away. Residential schools stole children and forced a language, culture, religion, and worldview upon them with the intention of destroying Indians and, by extension, Indian Nations.⁶⁰ In 1900, the Alberni Indian Residential School was fully operating. My grandma and her siblings were forced to attend this school. It was burned down three times, and it was rebuilt every time. It was also one of the schools where they conducted nutritional experiments on the children.⁶¹

⁵⁸ When I use the term Indian in this dissertation, it will refer to Indians and defined by the Indian Act, which can be found in section 2(1) of the Indian Act: <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/i-5/page-1.html#h-331794>

⁵⁹ Starblanket, Tamara. *Suffer the Little Children: Genocide, Indigenous Nations and the Canadian State*. Clarity Press, 2018.

⁶⁰ I use the word Indian here for the sake of continuity with the wording used in the Duncan Campbell Scott quote but also because I am talking about the residential school era of Indian Act.

⁶¹ Morrow, Shayne. "Canada must apologize for nutritional experiments at residential school: Tseshah." *Ha-Shilth-Sa Newspaper*. July 17, 2013. <https://www.hashilthsa.com/news/2013-07-17/canada-must-apologize-nutritional-experiments-residential-school-tseshah>

In our oral history, we know that they had an incinerator in the basement of the Alberni Indian Residential School. We also know they burned the bodies of the children they killed.

The wounds of this knowledge go deep inside all of us.

You're not alone
I see it in your eyes
That pain you carry
Deep inside
It tries to pull you under
As you fight to stay alive
Sometimes you wonder
Why you should even try.
Listen can you hear
It rippling out
onto the land
making the birds cry



This is a picture of my grandma, Beaulah Watts-Sayers (on the right), sitting in front of the Alberni Indian Residential School.⁶² She was sent there at the age of three, and as I write this dissertation my son is three years old. Every time I remember this, my heart aches through the generations, and I hold my son a little closer each time. I try not to let myself crumble under the weight of knowing the things that I do about what happened to my family in those schools. I try my hardest to make sure my son doesn't have to carry all the same things I did. I try.

you pinned
my legs to
the ground
with your feet
and demanded
I stand up⁶³

⁶² Unknown photographer. *Beulah and Leeta in front of A.I.R.S.* Unknown date. Sayers Family Archives

⁶³ Kaur, Rupi. *Milk and Honey*. Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2015. 25

My father was forced to attend residential school. He was sent to Desmarais (St. Martin's) Residential School in Wabasca, Alberta, where really horrible things happened to him. My son is part of the first generation in our family who will have a parent who did not go to residential school.

Emotions fill the rest of this page.

I love you, dad.

You wanted me to understand
the world on your terms
so you shoved your language down my throat
hoping one day I would forget how
to speak at all.

You wanted that silence to mask
every time you raped me
and my brothers
and my sisters
thinking our bodies were yours.

You wanted to beat the indian out of me
so I would spend my life
In fear.

You wanted me to be civilized
so you did it in the name of god.

You wanted us gone
so you took me away from my home
shoved me in a metal box labelled genocide
with all the other stolen children.

You wanted it to be
“a sad chapter of our history”
that you could throw money at
and make it all go away
you keep trying to hide
the way it really happened
even though it’s everywhere you look
all of the bodies still buried in school yards
in the scars of bodies and minds
the weight that you placed on my shoulders
when you left me beaten to die alone
I picked myself up and made it home
if it’s survival of the fittest
what have you had to survive?

In *Suffer the Little Children: Genocide, Indigenous Nations and the Canadian State*, Nehiyaw legal scholar Tamara Starblanket shows how residential schools in Canada facilitated genocide by the Canadian state on First Nations. Throughout the course of her book, she explains how residential schools meet the criteria to be legally defined as genocide in international law, namely the UN Genocide Convention (1948). I want to specifically mention here that one of the criteria for genocide in international law is forcibly removing children from one race of people to another. She argues that genocide against Indigenous Nations is written into colonial law, although not explicitly named as such, and that it continues as a part of Canada's ongoing colonial project through child welfare laws and policies that specifically target Indigenous Peoples. Starblanket goes on to explain that the way Canada has defined genocide in its criminal code allows for Canada to evade detection, responsibility, and consequence, even though genocide against First Nations in Canada is still happening today: she sees it as "the goal of assimilation or absorption into the colonial society or (body politic) has not changed over time and the result of the ongoing removal at this stage is still the same."⁶⁴ She says Canada, and other states, continue to commit genocide, actively contribute to the political (re)defining of genocide with an emphasis on mass killings instead of the complex and multifaceted forms of genocide.⁶⁵ Colonial nation states continue to change the meaning of genocide to evade responsibility within the laws of their nation state as well as international law.

Open my heart
Let out the wind
It's blowing so hard
I'm wearing thin.

⁶⁴ Starblanket, Tamara. *Suffer the Little Children: Genocide, Indigenous Nations and the Canadian State*. Clarity Press, 2018. 32.

⁶⁵ This is a criteria of the convention's definition of "genocide," but not the only one.

The way I remember reconciliation, from my family's oral history and witnessing through attending First Nations political organization meetings, was as a term that started being pushed on us in BC in 2005 when the New Relationship happened.⁶⁶ In this context, the meaning it held was to Reconciling Aboriginal and crown titles and jurisdictions.⁶⁷ In 2008, following the Indian Residential School Settlement, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established as a part of the settlement as was the apology on behalf of the Canadian Government. Residential school survivors had to go back to court to get Prime Minister Stephen Harper to actually do the apology. Nothing says I'm sorry like the Canadian Court telling you to do it, twice. The meaning of reconciliation changed across the country following these series of events. The word now refers to reconciling past wrongs. I personally have experienced reconciliation as new name for colonialism as it became Canadians' favourite word used for neutralizing First Nations Peoples to be accepting of past, present, and future colonization. I'm not a reconciliation Indian but to those of you who are, you do you, fam.⁶⁸

White people, if y'all wanna leave and then apply to come back on First Nations terms, then sure maybe then we can talk reconciliation about past wrongs. Let's talk about the rape, murder, genocide, and abuse at residential schools. And we'll also talk about the current child welfare law and policies. Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women, girls, 2SLGBTQI+. The wide-spread destruction of the lands and waters of our territories. Over-incarceration of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Land theft. Let's talk reconciliation, white folks!

never
trust anyone
who says
they do not see color.
this means
to them
you are invisible.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ The New Relationship came about when some BC First Nations and the Government of BC decided to come together and work towards common goals after many decades of legal, political, and social conflicts. It was intended to "bridge the gap" between First Nations and settlers.

⁶⁷ Government of BC. "The New Relationship." *gov.bc.ca*. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/consulting-with-first-nations/agreements/other-docs/new_relationship_accord.pdf

⁶⁸ For more reading on how Canada has defined and redefined reconciliation in Canadian law, see Nichols, Joshua Ben David. *A Reconciliation without Recollection?: An Investigation of the Foundations of Aboriginal Law in Canada*. University of Toronto Press, 2019.

⁶⁹ Waheed, Nayyirah. *salt*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013.

I remember where I was the day of the residential school apology in June 2008. I was at a First Nations Summit meeting at the Chief Joe Mathias Centre on the SK̓W̓X̓WÚ7MESH ÚXWUMIXW (Squamish Nation) reserve. They had big TVs up and the hall was full. I remember standing wall-to-wall with everyone in the hall. We were all packed in together. I didn't want Harper's stupid forced apology, but at some point, I found myself crying and I couldn't stop. I can't begin to describe the feeling of being in that room, but it is woven into every fibre of my being.



I took this photo in January, 2026. It shows my son and my mom painting over a swastika at the Every Child Matters monument, which is located just down the hill from the old Alberni Indian Residential School. It was the third incident in a string of racial vandalism that happened there.

My grandma Bea and great aunt Jessie were fluent in the Hupačasath̓ dialect of the Nuučaañuł language. Growing up, they spoke it when talking to each other, and it floated through the air covering everywhere it landed, including out onto the land. The land speaks Nuučaañuł too. They would also talk to other Nuučaañuł women and laugh in ways they couldn't in English. A large part of the potlatches and ceremonies we attended growing up were conducted in the Nuučaañuł language only. Neither my grandma nor my great aunt Jessie raised their children to be fluent in our language. In my experience, this is quite common with residential school survivors.

My grandpa Dan was one of the first people in Hupačasath to become fluent in English. He could speak, read, and write in it. I'm his great granddaughter, and I am not fluent in our language, and we now have no Nuučaañuł speakers fluent in our dialect left.⁷⁰ In *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o talks about the reliance of colonialism being conducted in the English language because it colonizes the mind of those it is seeking to colonize. He says true decolonization can only happen in the languages of our nations.⁷¹ What does it mean for our nation when we no longer have our dialect of our language and can only speak in the language of the colonizer? Right now, in the words of Beth Brant, "I bend and shape this unlovely language in a way that will make truth."⁷²

you are not a mistake. you are too many
exquisite details to be a mistake. (166).
i s t u,,,,,m b l e in this language.
i fa ll down in this lang ua GE.
i am p & a & i & n = in this lang | uage.
my (mouth). Heart. Arms are losing muscle + in this l
a n g u a ge.
my body does not \$ recognize the taste \$ of this –
language-.
- long.

in this LANGUAGE.
i am not/ {myself} in this l anguage."
- e.n.g.l.i.s.h./ for all of us who are held
Captive.⁷³

⁷⁰ This is a bold statement to make and one I make from the knowledge I carry from the Elders that taught me. There are members of my nation who speak but it is arguably not in our dialect.

⁷¹ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. *Decolonising the Mind : The Politics of Language in African Literature*. J. Currey, 1986.

⁷² Brant, Beth. *Writing as Witness: Essay and Talk*. Women's Press, 1994. 51.

⁷³ Waheed, Nayyirah. Salt. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013.

Residential schools produced a legacy of intergenerationally suppressed emotions. The teaching of taking up as little space as possible so no one notices you're there. Growing up on the rez, I wish I knew that it was okay to have emotions. It was okay to have a voice that could be heard. And now here I am writing this dissertation, struggling to be known.

Here is space to breathe and hear the trees

Canoe

Hhoo hhoo hhoo

as the indian river

flows into the Burrard inlet

flowing out to the ocean

my grandfather and grandfathers

paddled in canoes

instead of cedar carved canoe I have a pen

Hhoo hhoo hhoo

Go

Tear drop rain drop blood drop in my canoe

My canoe – asking praying know I am my canoe

Cedar my canoe is my pen

The paddle words I share again

HHOO HHOO HHOO⁷⁴

⁷⁴ George, Wil. "Canoe." *Gatherings 14 En'owkin Reunion*.. Editor Karen W. Olson. Vol 14. Theytus Books, 2003. 16



These are tucup (sea urchin), and I have only gotten to eat them a handful of times throughout my life.⁷⁵ Four Elders and I joyfully sat together next to the giant tote filled with tucup while we watched the ocean as there was singing and dancing from the Potlatch in the background.

⁷⁵ Sayers, Alana. *Hundreds of Sea Urchin*. 2017.

My family was one of many families discriminated against by the Indian Act because of racialized violence against Indian women. From 1867 until 1985, the Indian Act stated that Indian women would lose their Indian Status upon marrying a non-Indian man. It also granted Indian Status to non-Indian women who married Status Indian men. When my grandma Bea married my grandpa Eric, she lost her Indian Status because he was a white man. My mom and her siblings were raised without Indian Status and were not allowed to receive any rights as Status Indians (such as housing, fish, or healthcare) even though they were Indians. They had always been Indians. In 1985, the equality rights in section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms came into effect and gave Indian women, who had been fighting for decades to change this sexist and racist section of the Indian Act, the tool to finally force change through Bill C-31. In addition, Bill C-31 made amendments to the Indian Act and eliminated the loss of or gaining of status through marriage. It also gave Indian Status back to Indian women who had lost it and gave status to their children. However, this amendment did not take back Indian Status given to white women. When my great grandma Annie died, my great aunt Jessie was the only living child of hers that had Indian status, and therefore all of my great-grandma's properties went to my great aunt. When my grandma regained her Status, her sister did not give any of the property she inherited from my great grandma to my grandma. All of the things that were denied by the federal government to Indian women and their children during this time has never been rectified. But the damage it did will last for many generations.

My great grandparents Dan and Annie had Indian Status. My grandma Bea was born with Indian Status in 1931, lost that Status in 1951, and then regained that status after the 1985 amendment. My mom was born without Status but was eligible to be given Status in 1985. I was born with Indian Status and so was my son. While my grandmother's Status was taken away, she still continued living our ways amongst our people in every way she could. She still went to fish day until the colonized mentality became prevalent amongst our people, and they stopped allowing her to receive salmon because she was not Status. She spoke our language fluently, and it was something no one could take from her. I know our culture, governance, and ways of life because she continued to be who our people have always been, even after residential school and losing her Indian status. This shows another layer of colonialism that has impacted and shaped our relationship to our waters and the salmon. Fishing used to be done on an as-needed basis to feed the people throughout the year. All of the restrictions on our ability to fish changed many peoples view on fishing from food to property. Aileen Moreton Robinson writes about white possessions and everything within a settler state is considered property. By changing fish to be seen as property, a status Indian is entitled to through an Aboriginal right it shifts the focus from feeding our families (whether status or not).

My culture has been reimagined for your benefit
Our traditions pushed aside for your betterment
Our land exploited for your settlement
And now I should accept
that we are equals The past is of the past
And we will move forward
Without reparations
Without revitalization
Without justice . . .
And now I should accept How you criticize me How my body has been
colonized
My mind created in division Not fully of me, not fully of you
Lost somewhere in the middle . . .
My culture has been reimagined for your comfort
Our traditions pushed aside by your hand Our land exploited for your
imperial design
And now here I am A bougainvillea reaching between the cracks of the
Tumon promenade
A grain of sand blowing at the edge of Ipan A coconut crab waiting to be
pet at Chamorro Village And now here I am (Shaylin Nicole Salas 158).⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Salas, Shaylin Nicole. "And. Now." *Indigenous Pacific Islander Eco-Literatures*, edited by Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner et al., University of Hawai'i Press, 2022, pp. 158–158. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2524xpt.53>

The feds even regulate our love lives through the Indian Act. For example, if I don't have children with a status Indian man from my nation, it could be the beginning to the end of my family line in Hupačasath First Nation. If I have children with a non-status Indian, and so does my child, my grandchildren would not have Indian status. It just takes two generations. That is how Indian status works for us.

Moniyas
I let you in
let you past
bedroom door
black lace underwear
deep inside
making love
chest to chest
lips and tongue mating
as we did
sweat dripping
laughter low
sweet wave of orgasm
clenching tight
holding you within

monyias
I let you in
to my home
to my thoughts
to my heart
letting that feeling begin
you know that feeling
he could be special
this could be something
I like him
shit

making plans
in my head
of what this could mean

this political and social choice
of dating white
in a world of Indian Acts
and secondary citizenship
in a government system
designed to erase my rights
acknowledging that if I move forward with this
I am assisting the colonized system
yeah, call it a feeling.⁷⁷

The other thing I have to take under into consideration when choosing the father of my child is which band I want my child to be registered. Both of my parents are registered status Indians, but according to the Indian Act, Indians can only be registered in one Indian Band. So even though I am from both Alexander and Hupačasath, I cannot legally be registered in both. I can culturally and socially be Cree, but I cannot legally hunt in our territory, run for chief (LOL), or inherit land from my father and our family because I am not registered in Alexander. I'm still Cree but not according to Canada *laughs in Cree*. Indigeneity has and will always go beyond legal bounds.

But speaking of running for chief, a little while ago, there was a community announcement that a limited amount of rhubarb, from the Hupačasath garden, was going to be available at the band hall and would be dropped off sometime in the morning. This same announcement happened several times throughout, that week, and I went everyday hoping to get some. Sadly, I didn't get any rhubarb but a few weeks later, there was a rumour going around that I was going to be running for chief because I was at the band hall waving at everyone. Vote Alana for Hupačasath chief April 2025, rhubarb for everyone! Disclaimer: I did not actually run for chief.⁷⁸



⁷⁷ Campbell, Tenille K. *#IndianLovePoems*. Signature Editions, 2017. 88—89.

⁷⁸ @rezbambi. *Beaded Status Card Post*. Instagram. 2 October 2025. <https://www.instagram.com/p/DPT2AfnDy1C/>

#687

call me chief
he says
lightly slapping my ass
as he bends me over
band hall desk
papers scatter
down
yearly financials
welfare cheques
education pleas

call me chief
he hisses
grunting low and hard
as he pounds deep
from his mind
slips
old houses
unpaved roads
teachers who quit
call me chief
he moans
when I take him in my mouth
sucking hard and fast
as he grips my hair
dried sweet grass crumbling
smudge bowls abandoned
upon split bookcases

call
me
chief⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Campbell, Tenille K. *#IndianLovePoems*. Signature Editions, 2017. 49.

Growing up, we always did Indian Act related things through a regulatory federal government body called the Department of Indian Affairs. It's gone through multiple name rebrands since, but to a lot of us it'll always be Indian Affairs. Please enjoy this video below:⁸⁰

<https://www.tiktok.com/@elvishughboy/video/7022270807862775046? r=1& t=ZS-92kZb8zkmPc>

I grew up attending Assembly of First Nations (AFN) meetings with my mom. Throughout my time attending AFN meetings and functions, I learned a lot about its history, its leaders, and the changing needs of First Nations and First Nations peoples across the country, inside and outside of the AFN. I didn't know that I was witnessing the first large-scale First Nations nationalist advocacy organization. The AFN has created a specific type of First Nations nationalism. Originally, it was the National Indian Brotherhood when it was founded in the 70s. It was originally founded as a lobby group, but in the past two decades has been coopted by First Nations and non-First Nations leaders to be a group representative of all First Nations peoples across Canada capable of giving consent on their behalf. I would argue that the state created specific forms of settler-colonialism to shape the First Nations nationalism that has come from the AFN through parameters surrounding the funding it gives to the organization. This specific state-created specific forms of settler-colonialism use the institutionalization of First Nations nationalism through the AFN to reinforce the guardian-ward dynamics and narratives used to reinforce the dynamic (i.e., working with the feds is the only way forward) the state relies upon. The Canadian state also continues to expand the ways in which it can use the AFN to bypass working with nations individually to benefit from First Nations nationalism.

I've seen a lot of things over the years attending First Nations' political meetings. New cultures have emerged over time from the institutionalization of these advocacy and political organizations. In my family's oral history, people used to scrape together what little money they could to attend the AFN meetings when the organization first formed. People would sleep in cars or on the floors of hotels or local homes because of the importance of what was possible from First Nations across Canada joining together to push back against colonization by the Canadian state. People wanted to come together and stand together. After decades of being infiltrated by the Canadian state, AFN has been reduced to mainly following rules and procedures that mimic western institutional structures. What I mean by that is thousands of chiefs gather in major cities across the country for the AFN AGM every year and motions are passed and it is not much more than that anymore. The AFN is what First Nations and white people know and continue to use.

⁸⁰ Hughboy, Elvis @elvishughboy. *Indian Affairs Video*. TikTok. 10-23-2021.

Let's talk about the colonial cisheteropatriarchy that dominates so much of Indian country. I can use one example from AFN to really capture just how deeply imbedded this is amongst our people. The dismantling of which is rarely ever spoken about when people talk about decolonization and indigenous resurgence. One of the memories that always stands out to me is being 9 years old in the summer of 1997 at an AFN AGM in Vancouver. It was an election year, and it was a big year because it was one of the first times a woman was a real contender to become the National Chief. Wendy Grant-John and Phil Fontaine became the last two candidates in an election that went into the middle of the night. I remember sleeping on the floor of the convention centre waiting for more results coming in. I didn't exactly know why it was a big deal at the time, but I remember the feeling that was in that room: being on the verge of a new AFN reality that hadn't been seen before. The first woman National Chief actually didn't happen until 2021. (I don't know enough to speak with authority, only from a very distant viewpoint, Roseanne Archibald is accused of doing something which got her ousted as National Chief. I don't know whether or not what she actually did what the chiefs accused her of and whether or not it warranted her removal; however, what I do know is that all the chiefs before her were men who did shady things and none of them were removed as national chief).

Another example of colonial cisheteropatriarchy I experienced while at the AFN, in the summer of 2009, I was in Calgary attending the Assembly of First Nations Annual General Assembly, like I had a lot of the summers of my life. It was an election year. I decided to help campaign for who I thought was the best candidate. That candidate was not the individual from BC who was running. I was not anticipating the response by others in the slightest. I was happily campaigning for my candidate and suddenly a majority of the leaders I had grown up around were yelling sexist and derogatory things at me in the halls of the convention centre, in hotel lobbies and elevators, and in the streets of Calgary. On multiple occasions, I was also spit on, including by a very senior member of the current First Nations leaders in the province. That same man also called me a traitorous cunt who deserved to die. If you can think of a word like these, I was probably publicly called it. I was 21 years old. A lot of these leaders are still leaders in the province today. The ones who didn't yell at me or spit at me watched others who did. I continued to campaign for my candidate until the election was over. The next day, one of the Elders from BC pulled me into an empty room and told me that what happened to me shouldn't have happened. I said no it shouldn't have but you didn't try to stop it, and you won't try to fix it because you're just like them: grown First Nations men afraid of the power of the voice of a young First Nations woman. Patriarchy is colonial and it has our people in a chokehold and own our people take part in the choking. Patriarchy benefits those that reproduce it. I remember one moment of walking down the busy street the convention centre was on, while a row of men from BC in leadership roles yelled at me, and realized that I watched men in leadership roles do the same thing to my mom my whole life. I left any involvement in First Nations politics, and I've never gone back.

This is a give away poem

You've come gathering made a circle with me of the places
I've wandered I give you the first daffodil opening
from earth I've sown I give you warm loaves of bread baked
in soft mounds like breasts In this circle I pass each of you
a shell from our mother sea Hold it in your spirit Hear
the stories she'll tell you I've wrapped your faces
around me a warm robe Let me give you ribbonwork leggings
dresses sewn with elk teeth moccasins woven with red
& sky blue porcupine quills
I give you blankets woven of flowers & roots Come closer
I have more to give this basket is very large
I've stitched it of your kind words
Here is a necklace of feathers & bones
sacred meal of chokecherries
Take this mask of bark which keeps out the evil ones
This basket is only the beginning
There is something in my arms for all of you
I offer this memory of sunrise seen through ice crystals
Here an afternoon of looking into the sea from high rocks
Here a red-tailed hawk circles over our heads
One of her feathers drops for your hair
May I give you this round stone which holds an ancient spirit
This stone will soothe you
Within this basket is something you've been looking for
all of your life Come take it Take as much as you need
I give you seeds of a new way
I give you the moon shining on a fire of singing women
I give you the sound of our thoughts flying
I give you the sound of peace moving into our faces & sitting down
Come This is a give away poem
I cannot go home
until you've taken everything & the basket which held it
When my hands are empty
*I will be full*⁸¹

⁸¹ Chrystos. *Not Vanishing*. Press Gang Publishers, 1988. 100.

During the second part of the twentieth century, imperial powers were changing. British imperialism was diminishing as American and Canadian imperialism were rapidly growing. In Canada, human rights, racial and gender equality movements were on the rise and demanding changes to the settler-colonial system. For example, in 1951, amendments made to the Indian Act allowed Indians to hire lawyers for the purposes of land claims. These phenomena contributed to the creation of the environment that cultivated First Nations nationalism, as First Nations banded together to fight back—in provincial, national, and international forums—against the Canadian state’s on-going settler colonialism, which claimed ownership over First Nations Peoples and lands.

This led to things such as the first friendship centers being formed, starting in the 1950s which has and continues to be a voice and community within city centres for First Nations people. And the formation of the National Indian Brotherhood in 1968, which later (in 1982) became the Assembly of First Nations. It was meant to be a lobby group to serve as another tool for First Nations People to use in their fight to protect their lands and peoples from further encroaching colonialism that were rapidly increasing in a multitude of ways. In response to First Nations exercising their sovereignty inside and outside of Canada, in 1969 Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau (PET) and Indian Affairs Minister Jean Chretien proposed what has come to be known as the “White Paper,” which sought to abolish the Indian Act, and by extension abolish Indian Nations, by legally assimilating Indians into the fabric of Canada as Canadians and not as Indians with Indian rights and there reinforcing the settler-colonial narrative that Canada legally owns the land.⁸² PET did this under the liberal guise of equality and the idea of a “just society,” which he claimed could not be achieved with the discriminatory legislation of the Indian Act (it just suddenly became discriminatory: when the Indian Act was no longer serving the needs of the state poof, it’s discriminatory!). The White Paper was created with the intention of abolishing Indians in Canada by eliminating Indian Status, ending current treaties, and transferring the authority of Indian Affairs to the provinces (i.e., pass the buck the provinces).

The White Paper was met with extreme resistance and opposition by First Nations across Canada. The Indian Chiefs of Alberta responded with “the Red Paper,” or Citizens Plus, a proposal which completely rejected the White Paper and demanded that the Canadian government uphold all treaties and legal responsibilities towards First Nations. An important text that came out was *The Unjust Society: The Tragedy of Canada’s Indians* by Harold Cardinal, which spoke in depth about the legal and political climate during the time of the White Paper. At this same time, the American civil rights movement and the American Indian Movement were mobilizing. By 1971,

⁸² I use the word Indian here as I am speaking about the Indian Act. I am also speaking specifically about Indians under the umbrella term aboriginal which ended up being the word used in the constitution.

Trudeau’s cabinet would withdraw the White Paper and pass a “multiculturalism policy.” It was back to the drawing board for the feds.

Walk with me
across the page
through the trails of
words woven together

During his tenure as Prime Minister, PET sought to get Canada its own constitution as Canada was not actually considered fully sovereign until the passing of the constitution in 1982. (I’m born in the late 80s, so Canada being a sovereign nation isn’t much older than me. Is Canada’s sovereignty a millennial too? LOL.). The constitution provided another avenue to achieve the assimilation that the White Paper set out to do, and the attempts made by PET’S government to do so can be seen in the publicly available proposed drafts of the constitution, which show the wording of diminishing legal status or just straight up legal erasure of First Nations and to their lands. In response to the proposed versions, First Nations People across Canada rose up and fought against them by starting movements across the country from 1980—1982. One important event that occurred during this time came to be known as the Constitutional Express, which was two trains that travelled from Vancouver to Ottawa in protest on November 24, 1980. To show the solidarity of First Nations across the country, one train took a more northern route through Edmonton and one a southern route through Calgary. Every time the train stopped, First Nations people met the trains to join in protest, alongside those on the train, the repatriation of the constitution in its proposed form. By the time the trains arrived in Winnipeg, this movement showed the solidarity of First Nations’ rejection of the Canadian constitution, and captured national media attention. By the time the trains arrived in Ottawa, an excessive amount of police and security were in place in response to the power of the movement. First Nations people knew the importance of what was taking place with the constitution and demanded their voices be heard.⁸³

⁸³ My mom attended these events and organized a constitution event in Edmonton. The history you see here was passed down through oral knowledge in my family, and I have added in some academic sources to appease the white man.

Crisis Poem #1

iwishi couldw riteth epoemi
wantor eadina timeo fcrisis

{repeat}

ineed towriteth epoemi
wantor eadina timeo fcrisis

{repeat}

thisi snotth epoemi
needtow riteina timeo fcrisis

{repeat}

thisi sjustat est ofawri
terina timeo fcrisis

{repeat}⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Teaiwa, Teresia. "Crisis Poem #1; Crisis Poem #2." *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 2013, 24 (3): 147–50.

In 1982, with the finalizing of the Canadian Constitution Act looming, the Indian Association of Alberta brought their case to England to argue that it was England that was responsible for Indian treaties and not Canada. In *The Queen v. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, ex parte* Lord Denning instead ruled that the responsibility for the treaties transferred to Canada and that the wording in the proposed constitution was enough to prove England's due diligence in ensuring treaty rights in Canada. However, the supposed transfer of treaties and changes to the wording on rights in the constitution happened without the inclusion of or consent of the First Nations in those treaties. Lord D was pretty much like, "it's your problem now, Canada."

PET did eventually amend the Constitution Act to include section 35 of the constitution which states "the existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed."⁸⁵ The word "existing" was added before treaty and Aboriginal rights into section 35, which had not appeared in the proposed version of the constitution prior to the ratification of it. The addition of the word is critical as it locks First Nations into a past state of being with limited legal and political agency in current and future contexts and has a huge impact on Aboriginal rights. Section 35 was included in the constitution only because First Nations fought for it.

Canada created the Aboriginal Canada in section 35(2) of the Canadian Constitution. It defines a new racialized legal term as "In this Act, *aboriginal peoples of Canada* includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada."⁸⁶ Whereas in the Indian Act, "*Indian* means a person who pursuant to this Act is registered as an Indian or is entitled to be registered as an Indian."⁸⁷ Aboriginal is not the term First Nations people fought extremely hard to be included in the Canadian Constitution as. The Canadian state intentionally used the term "Aboriginal"⁸⁸ instead of Indian since none of the previous laws and policies had worked to abolish Indians or Indian

⁸⁵ Government of Canada. "Constitution Act, 1981." *laws-lois.justice.gc.ca*. <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/const/page-12.html#docCont>

⁸⁶ Constitution Act 1982, Government of Canada <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/const/page-15.html#h-38>

⁸⁷ Interpretation. Indian Act 1876, Government of Canada. <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/i-5/page-1.html#h-331716>

⁸⁸ I am not a lawyer or legal scholar so to the best of my ability in interpreting the Supreme Court documents, the first time the term aboriginal appeared in Canada law was in the original 1967 Calder Case and the use of the term went onto be used in the supreme court of Canada ruling in 1973. I found insanely little written about the history of the term aboriginal in Canada. It being accepted without question for me really confirms the intentions behind its use by the feds to further colonized Indians.

nations, such as the White Paper or Residential Schools. It was a new wave of settler colonialism through racialization.

We can also employ Aileen Moreton-Robinson's work on settler colonialism being about white possession to further contextualize the Canadian state's decision to use the term Aboriginal. In *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*, Moreton-Robinson talks about how the settler state creates possessive logics through discourse and socially produced conventions to reinforce those structures to claim and control Indigenous lands, nations, and peoples as white possessions owned by the state. Moreton-Robinson says Canada's (or your settler-nation state's) use of the logics of white possession are underpinned by an excessive desire to invest in narratives and truths to legitimize white settler claims to native lands.⁸⁹

Similarly, in his book *Wasase*, Mohawk scholar Gerald Taiaiake Alfred says that "aboriginalism is assimilation's end-game," meaning aboriginalism "is the final stage of the annihilation of an independent existence for the original peoples."⁹⁰ He also refers to aboriginalism as genocidal because First Nations spend our time and energy developing this "state-sponsored identity" under the illusion it is furthering our nations. Alfred says that we should instead be putting that time and energy into the resurgence and continuation of our own nations.⁹¹ Another way Aboriginal is used to eliminate Indian people is through the Canadian legal system. From 1982 onwards, the term Aboriginal was regularly used in Canadian law, and it is still called Aboriginal law (not Indigenous). Prior to that, it was referred to as the law as it relates to Indians. This switch from the courts interpreting Indian rights to Aboriginal rights is significant as they have differing legal racial definitions. (Through research and conversations, I have not been able to locate the original case the term "aboriginal" appears in, or a legal justification for why it began to be used before the ratification of the constitution in Canadian law. The acceptance and naturalization of it seemingly without question piqued my interest). In her article, "She Must be Civilized, She Paints her Toenails," Cree legal scholar Sharon Venne says the following:

Why classify Indigenous Peoples by racial identity? As the years move onward, and intermarriage continues to occur between the nations, eventually no one group will have the necessary blood quantum to meet the colonizer's quota. Under these kinds of rules, in time, Indigenous Peoples would 'legally' disappear. If there are no 'legal' Indigenous Peoples, then the lands become 'terra nullius' – belonging to

⁸⁹ Moreton-Robinson, Aileen. *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*. University of Minnesota Press, 2015. xiii.

⁹⁰ Alfred, Taiaiake. *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*. University of Toronto Press, 2009. 126.

⁹¹ Ibid.

no one. Then, the lands can be open for the colonizer to occupy and use without obstruction. Why would the colonizers spend so much time trying to determine who is an Indigenous person? Why try to control Indigenous Nations? It gives a false sense of security for the colonizer to control their environment. If the colonizer's legal system can define who is an Indigenous person and who is not, then control to lands and territories comes without question.⁹²

You have to remember that the feds did not anticipate that status Indian numbers would grow and Indian nations would remain. They assumed their genocidal project would be successful and Indians would want to assimilate into Canadian society. Choosing the term Aboriginal to be used in the constitution was an intentional attempt to try to extinguish Indian rights by making them Aboriginal rights. Because, according to the logics of self-identification, anyone can claim to be Aboriginal (or Indigenous), and therefore anyone in Canada can have potential rights and title to the land.

There is a dirt road in me.

It takes you to a place like a reserve but not

Because there are only cree girls

And no one is falling apart in a bad way.

We are a people

Who proliferate

Only as a potentiality.

Do not compare us to the rain

Unless you fucking mean it.

Why did my love scare you?

Was it too dirt road?

What would you have done with a dirt road anyways?⁹³

⁹² Venne Sharon H. "She Must be Civilized, She Paints her Toenails." *Being Indigenous: Perspectives on Activism, Culture, Language, and Identity*. Edited by S. Neyooxet Greymorning. Routledge, 2018. 172.

⁹³ Belcourt, Billy-Ray. *This Wound Is a World : Poems*. Frontenac House Poetry, 2017.

Métis, Inuit, and Indians are very different groups of people. In this paragraph, I am not trying to define Indigeneity nor attempt to draw its bounds however I am saying that Métis, Inuit, and Indian are already racial umbrella terms, and the state intentionally placed us together in a different racialized legal term intentionally to erase Indians and whiten the parameters.⁹⁴ I am going to talk briefly about my Métis history in order to highlight these things. In *Métis: Race, Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood (2014)*, Chris Andersen says the Red River Métis are a post-contact people⁹⁵ who established what they call the Métis Nation.⁹⁶ He also says that Métis should not be used to mean mixed (heritage, race, blood, etc.) and those who claim to be métis based upon any Indigenous ancestors are appropriating a Métis identity.⁹⁷ This specifically targets the settler-colonial ideology of self-identification. I also want to say here as well that through the Manitoba Métis Federation, you can gain Red River Métis Citizenship just by self-identifying⁹⁸ as Red River Metis instead of needing to have actual ancestors from there.⁹⁹ This is why it is so important for everyone to know what all of the different terms and definitions of Indian, Indigenous, Métis (and métis), and Aboriginal all mean and the history and uses of each term. Red River Métis have an actual Métis history, and then there are white people who find a random native ancestor, from anywhere, many generations back and self-identify as métis.

I actually have Red River Métis ancestors through my grandpa Sayers. My Sayers last name comes from Pierre G. Sayer. He and Alexander Bremner are our relatives on my grandpa's paternal side, and John M. Pritchard and Marie Rose Delorme on his maternal side. These ancestors were so long ago that I have no connection to them, and I actually didn't even know about them until recently, and I can't imagine trying to suddenly build my identity around this very distant ancestry. Maybe if a Métis culture or history was passed down to me, I would feel different, but it wasn't. Even though it is a part of my family history, it is not in my present in any way, so I would never claim to be Métis or have any connection to it outside my family tree. Being Cree and Nuučaanuł, I know we have been sovereign nations on our lands since ʔiiḡmuut (time immemorial), and the development of the Métis Nation is very recent in comparison. This is my lived experience on how very different my distant (and actual) Métis ancestry is from my current lived experience of being

⁹⁴ I just want to say that I am not Inuit and therefore will not speak on their behalf and this dissertation focuses on Indian history. However, their nations and people and their stories and histories are important.

⁹⁵ Andersen, Chris. *"Métis": Race, Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood*. UBC Press, 2014. 29.

⁹⁶ Ibid 110–114.

⁹⁷ Chris Andersen calls this Metis as mixed ideology.

⁹⁸ Manitoba Metis Federation. "Central Registry Office FAQs." *mmf.mb.ca*. <https://www.mmf.mb.ca/citizenship-application-faqs>

⁹⁹ Wolfe, Patrick. "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2006, pp. 387–409

a registered full-status Indian woman living on my reserve. Yet, they are both racially and politically categorized as Aboriginal (and Indigenous). Below is a photo from the grand opening of our Hupačasath Community Hall. In this photo you see a carved pole gifted to us by our neighbors, the Huu-ay-aht, being carried inside to be given to use through our generational protocol. This photo below captures the continuation of our ways and the practicing of our governance by continuing to be the nations we always have been.¹⁰⁰



Trying to extinguish Indian rights through Aboriginal law in Canadian law will take time, so to accelerate this process the Canadian state created Aboriginal (now Indigenous) self-identification. For decades, Indian people have seen the destructive impacts of self-identification and these impacts can plainly be seen right now all around us with the movements happening that are calling out pretendians (such as Buffy St. Marie and Thomas King). A “pretendian” is someone who claims indigeneity, typically for financial or professional gain, based upon a real or fake ancestor usually from at least five generations back. This almost always means that they have not had anyone connected to or participating in a First Nations group or community they claim to belong to and instead have been white for several generations. They have no lived experience as a First Nations person because they have no actual ancestral connection to the claimed culture or community, and this is exactly what the Canadian Government intended,¹⁰¹ as Venne said, to naturalize almost every Canadian as Aboriginal, and therefore the land belongs to everyone. Meanwhile, I am raising my son here on Ahaswinis where, according to our family oral history, we have lived since time immemorial, and where we are constantly surrounded by things that are way older than Canada. This photo is of my brother and my cousins dancing at a memorial potlatch for my great Uncle Bert Mack in Toquaht territory, which shows us continuing the ways

¹⁰⁰ Unknown photographer. *Carved pole being Carried*. 2002.

¹⁰¹ For more on race shifters see Kim Tallbear, Adam Gaudry (specifically how white people co-opt Metis Identity for race shifting), and Darryl Leroux.

of our nations that have continued through on-going settler colonialism by Canada. This photo is also our governance in action in the lands our people belong to and have never left. This photo is not Aboriginal or Indigenous. It is Toquaht. It is Nuučaañuł.¹⁰²



i gotta be Indian tomorrow
i came back to Nevada
because somebody decided
they needed a native american
on their radio show
& i came to mind
i'm flattered
& my ego drove me
200 miles over snow packed mountains
but now before the interview/reading
i'm panicked
i haven't written an "Indian poem"
in a long time
maybe only 1 out of 100 poems
even touch my tribal-ness

¹⁰² Alana Sayers. *Sayers and Mack Family Dancing at Potlatch*. 2017.

they think just because
i am native
means anything
i write is somehow rooted
in native-ness
but in flipping the pages of
my 3 ring binder
i find nothing mentioning
mother earth or feathers or reservations
even though
i stand on mother earth
& my rearview mirror has
an eagle feather tied to it
& after the interview
i'll be going back to the reservation
to see my family
is that indian enough
for them? i don't know
i guess it will have to be
tomorrow
i'll think deeper
about being an Indian¹⁰³

As we talk about First Nations nationalism, what does it look like now that it has shifted online? In the Fall of 2025, I saw a TikTok video posted by the user @adhdandipostlikeit where they analyzed the normalization of the shift from in-person to online connections through the examples of two hit songs. The first of which is Yung Joc's *It's Going Down* in 2006, and they state that where "it's going down" is in the malls and clubs as that's where people are meeting and connecting. They then turn to a 2016 hit entitled *Down in the DM* by Yo Gotti and say that where "it's going down" is now just in DMs (direct messages).¹⁰⁴ This example captures the drastic cultural shift during the first decade of the 2000s going from analog to digital and, as @adhdandipostlikeit says, to a reliance on social media for human connection. When I was born in the late 80s, we had a landline for a phone. Around Y2K, we got a home computer that was on

¹⁰³ Northsun, Nila. "i gotta be Indian tomorrow." *Living Nations, Living Words: An Anthology of First Peoples Poetry*. Joy Harjo, editor. WW Norton, 2021. 96-97.

¹⁰⁴ @adhdandipostlikeit. *The Cultural Importance of Down in the DM*. Tiktok. 10-12-2025.
<https://www.tiktok.com/@adhdandipostlikeit/video/7560587747019214111? r=1& t=ZS-92I51EFvNB>

a desk in our kitchen—more like took up most of the desk! I remember liking typing games and playing a Keroppi game until I became a teenager. And then it was MSN, Yahoo, and AOL messengers and chatrooms (ASL anyone??). And then a few years later, I had a cell phone. It's funny because I could tell you maybe two phone numbers off the top of my head of family and friends but programmed into my brain are still the landline phone numbers of some of the businesses in town that are still operational. I've seen First Nations go digital, go online, and come to exist in this space.

Social media is our new normal. My big claim to fame is I was once on the national news. Sorta. I was in the background of a news broadcast.¹⁰⁵ I was trying to take a teepee selfie for Instagram and didn't realize they were filming behind me. LMAO I too am all about social media. So much so it got me unintentionally in the background of the national news taking a TEEPEE SELFIE. There is no judgement from me. Just a desire to talk about what social media as our new normal means.



For First Nations, online spaces are now an arguably a central part of our daily lives and, therefore, warrants an urgent call to be studied, discussed, and analyzed by us. We need critical-thinking abilities for establishing protocols, governance, teachings. Social media is a place that is in need of on-going critical examination on how it is creating new form(s) of race, culture, and expressions

¹⁰⁵ Judith Sayers. Alana on tv taking selfie on the news. 2019.

of both. If you go out on the land, or tan hides, or harvest cedar bark, and you don't post it to social media, did it really happen anymore? Social media has also created a new resource for the colonial extraction(s) of Indigenous knowledges and ways of being through the theft of our content used for other purposes. When we hold generational knowledge, we have a responsibility to those knowledges and that should extend to online spaces as well.¹⁰⁶ Beyond generational knowledges through social media, how else may we experience colonization through the content we create and consume?

Social media is also a new tool for First Nations to use in a multitude of ways. First Nations using social media challenges the anti-indigenous racism that settler colonialism depends on by continuously exposing and countering the violent, dehumanizing, and inferior logics colonial narratives are constructed as, for example, Idle No More and the finding of 215 bodies at the residential school on Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation.¹⁰⁷ First Nations can use social media to help change narratives, worldviews or, at the very least, get people questioning what they see and don't see. National and transnational indigeneity through social media allows for the empowerment and expansion of ourselves and nations in positive ways through the intersections of resurgence, assertion, reclamation, and performativity. Social media is where we get to see what it means to being First Nations today and love seeing Indigenous folks use mediums that best allows them to create and express themselves.

I would describe myself as bougie-rez. I have a broken-down rez car in my driveway, but it's actually my smart car from my former city life. Our dog Kona is also bougie-rez. It's just the way creator made us. He eats sockeye salmon on the regular, was a regular at an organic dog spa in his former city life, and used to ride shotgun in my smart car. This picture below perfectly captures what I mean when I say bougie rez.¹⁰⁸ I had just gotten these beautiful crystal nails done while in Vancouver, but when we got home it was also fish day and a rez girl's gotta do what a rez girl's gotta do.

¹⁰⁶ For more reading on this see: Wemigwans, Jennifer. *A Digital Bundle: Protecting and Promoting Indigenous Knowledge Online*. 1st ed., University of Regina, 2018. Stephanie Carroll, Marisa Duarte, and Max Liboiron. (2024)

¹⁰⁷ For more on this see Bronwyn Carlson and Ryan Frazer. *Indigenous Digital Life: The Practice and Politics of Being Indigenous on Social Media*. 1st ed. 2021., Springer International Publishing, 2021.

¹⁰⁸ Sayers, Alana. *Manicured Crystal Nails Cleaning Sockeye Salmon*. 2025.



I love getting my nails done (OMG you need to go read Sharon Venne’s article “She Must be Civilized She Paints her Toenails;” it’s hilarious and brilliant). I love wearing big earrings, the bigger the better ammirite?!

I am a bougie native millennial through and through. I love pop culture, music from the early 2000s, and doomscrolling social media while binge watching a new show (*Bridgerton* season 4 is on in the background as I edit this dissertation). I love celebrating the holidays and hallmark Christmas movies (I am dying to write the first native Christmas one about a native woman who moves home to the rez around Christmas and reconnects with her brother’s childhood best friend and together they help save the community Christmas dinner). I also want to and actively try to decolonize and continue the ways of my family and nation. We all exist in a multitude of worlds now. They’re all a part of us. Being a millennial I am definitely drawn to pop culture and social media. Pop culture does tend to reinforce settler-colonial logics and narratives; however, it also allows for the creation of worlds/spaces/places where you can go to exist beyond them too.

Estrella Whetung. "Nindanikoobijiganag: We are Star People." An exhibition piece for the *On Beaded Ground* exhibition at the Legacy Gallery, Victoria, BC (2021).



These pieces are about finding a way to truly represent my Nishnaabe understandings of the cosmos through our Star People stories and teachings about relationality that mesh with my love for science fiction and my role as a Two-Spirit community member. I chose Yoda for this as an iconic figure from the Star Wars universe who has been embraced as a part of Indigeneity and Baby Yoda (Grogu) because he has become a celebrated contemporary Indigenous pop culture and futurisms icon. Elder Yoda's rainbow ribbon skirt reflects their Two Spirit identity and is meant to challenge colonial heteropatriarchal understandings of family, gender, and elders. Baby Yoda's mossbag is beaded with waterlilies to represent Nishnaabe stories of Star People and has beaded galaxies modelled after Star Wars. The beaded galaxy is inspired by Margaret Nazon's work. This work is meant to show the intergenerational bond that is so crucial between elders and children in community.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Estrella Whetung, "Nindanikoobijiganag: We are Star People," *On Beaded Ground*, 2021, https://legacy.uvic.ca/gallery/onbeadedground/estrella-whetung/ufy2xt_g/.

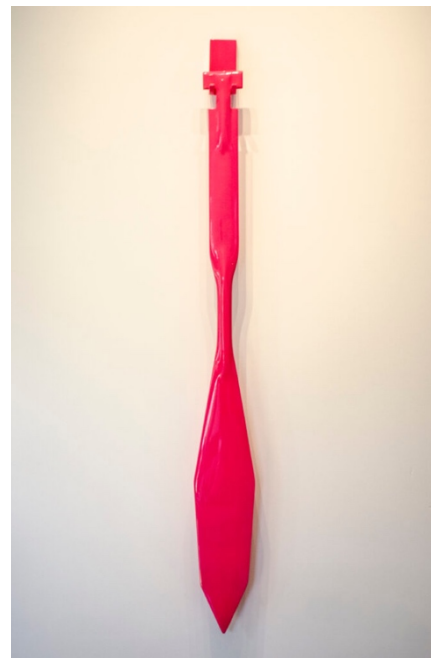
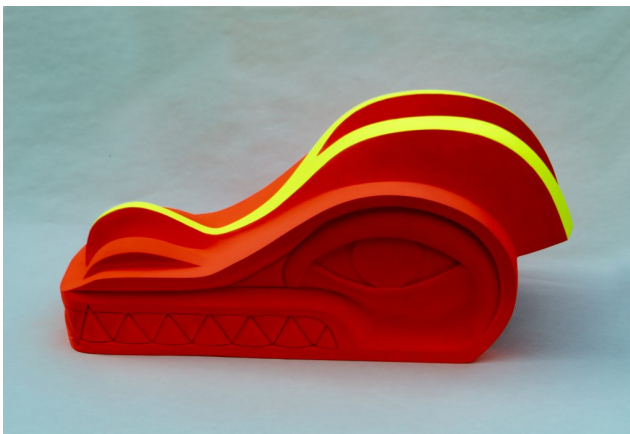
Cooking shows are big part of pop culture, and if you also watch them you know you RARELY see any Indigenous chefs (or Indigenous cuisine for that matter) on any mainstream cooking show in any capacity. Not surprising as not having an Indigenous presence is a crucial part of settler-colonial narratives. I was pleasantly surprised to see Shane Chartrand compete on *Top Chef Canada* in 2024, and this led me to find his book *Tawaw: Progressive Indigenous Cuisine*. This book was a big inspiration to me in the creation of this dissertation. A majority of those he cooks for are non-Indigenous, and Chartrand has found powerful ways to teach about colonialism through the presentation of his food on the plate. He also speaks to how he has explored, connected with, and expressed his identity through ingredients and presentations on the plate. Because I am Nuučaañuł and Cree, I would do a surf and turf with salmon and buffalo steak with a salal berry reduction, camas bulbs, fiddlehead ferns and wild onions. There are so many ways to tell our stories, and the way(s) he tells his really spoke to me.



When I found out I was accepted to speak at a conference in Aotearoa (New Zealand), I had this ribbon skirt made for me. This is me wearing it at Hobbiton. If you can't tell, I LOVE *the Lord of the Rings* and am also very aware that *the Lord of the Rings* has become part of the white-settler imaginary of the land of the Maori. My Hupačasath Indigeneity is absolutely intertwined with pop culture, and I wanted to use this example of my LOTR ribbon skirt because it reflects so many layers of colonialism and Indigeneity.

I could write an entire dissertation about how my experience in graduate school has been like LOTR.

In the current settler- colonial construction of the “Pacific Northwest,” a specific native image has been constructed, and I would argue also somewhat adopted by us native people here that depicts us in very specific and restrictive ways. For example, native Pacific Northwest art has expectations of what art from this area should look like. My uncle Rodney Sayers is rarely included in categories of Nuučaañuł art and or Pacific Northwest because his art does not fit nicely into what these categories are understood to be. Yet, he is both Nuučaañuł and from a nation that is located within the geographic area of the Pacific Northwest. He is an unbelievable artist and his art goes beyond the bounds of what is understood to be native in the Pacific Northwest. Below are photos of a couple of his creations.¹¹⁰



I would describe his work as weaving together the past, present, and future, and you can see this in the pictures above, which are a carved sea serpent and paddle. This is what I was also attempting to do in this dissertation: weave a map together in front of you that brings together the past, present, and future. At the beginning of this dissertation, I asked you to imagine settler colonialism as an ocean we are all in because, at the heart of settler colonialism, is land. By asking you to imagine settler colonialism as an ocean, it situates you in a communal place that has not been able to be colonized, claimed, and owned like land. The ocean is a place fully beyond the reach of every nation state and decentres land-based logics. I asked you to journey with me out into these waters so I can show you that the Critical, Coastal, Community-based,

¹¹⁰ Sayers, Rodney. *Carved Neon Sea Serpent* [left] and *Carved Hot Pink Paddle* [right]. <https://rodneysayers.com>.

Consciousness was created to help us all see the past, present, and future in ways we quite haven't before. I hope you'll take this woven map with you and let it lead you to more places just beyond the reach of the colonizing Canadian state.

You watched the sky every night

Waiting for the stars to change

And reveal themselves to you

I came to you as a comet

Falling from the sky

Rewriting all the lines

Afterword for academics (or anyone interested):

The CCCC

I wanted to mention a few scholars whose works were instrumental in the creation of the academic part of the CCCC. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire created what he called the critical consciousness, which was created to help his students understand the ways in which they have been oppressed and create/learn skills/tools to work to move beyond the ways in which they have been oppressed. This concept was also given a feminist centre in *engaged pedagogy: a transgressive education for critical consciousness* by Bell Hooks, and feminism needs to be a central part of decolonization to dismantle colonial cisheteropatriarchy. Wright and Belushi write about a Hawaiian Critical Consciousness in their article “Ka ‘Ikena a ka Hawai‘i: Toward a Kanaka ‘Ōiwi Critical Race Theory” and this article taught me a lot about academically centring the ocean in this concept. The community-based part of the CCCC actually means rez to me. The reasons being I grew up on my reserve, and I am also just rez because of that. I wanted to use the term community-based instead of rez to allow for a space where all Nuučaañuʻ felt like they can belong. Because of a multitude of reasons caused by settler-colonialism, not everyone lives on their homelands or reserves. I don’t use growing up on a reserve as a measure of authenticity, indigeneity, or the like; I do, however, advocate that it produces a specific type of indigeneity and is often unacknowledged and excluded from mainstream Indigenous academic discourse. For my fellow academics, how many Indigenous academics in your circle grew up on their reserves?

I relied heavily on scholars from the southwestern side of the Pacific Ocean as I was drawn to their work because their work centred around being ocean peoples. These books are *Kanaka ‘Ōiwi Methodologies: Mo‘olelo and Metaphor* (2015), *Finding Meaning: Kaona and Contemporary Hawaiian Literature* (2016), *Once Were Pacific: Māori Connections to Oceania* (2012), *Waves of Knowing: A Seascape Epistemology* (2016), and *Navigating CHamoru Poetry: Indigeneity, Aesthetics, and Decolonization* (2022). These Indigenous literary theory and Indigenous methodology texts provided me with frames of reference on what scholarship can look like when it centres around ocean-based perspectives when studying literature. They also speak to the specific types of colonialism their geographic locations have created, which is mainly being from small islands in the Pacific Ocean. If you take Hawaii, for example, it is an American state that faces extreme militant tourism, which rapidly destroys their lands. Similarly, Guam is an American territory whose lands and peoples have been overrun by extreme American militarization and has the highest number of undersea communications cables intersecting their territory. The Kanaka Maoli scholars have produced a solid body of work on Hawaiian Studies that continuously seeks to know itself.

Another concept that has essential to the creation of the CCCC is intersectionality, which was created by Kimberle Crenshaw in the late 1980s to combat the inability of the American judicial system to comprehend the complexities of discrimination for black women. In her article *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*, Crenshaw looks at several legal cases where black women were plaintiffs bringing cases of discrimination against employers only to have white male judges deny the possibility they could be discriminated against for being both women and black. Apparently, the capacity of the American legal system at this time only allowed for only type of discrimination (in this case, race or gender) at a time. She also highlights several passages in the rulings that show what she calls the “curious logic” used in their findings, which revealed “the narrow scope of antidiscrimination doctrine and its failure to embrace intersectionality”¹¹¹ as well as whiteness being the centre of how discrimination is understood. Crenshaw shows how a lack of intersectionality was denying black women the ability to legally fight against discrimination. She also points out that feminism and anti-racism will also be limited in their ability to expand fully without intersectional approaches because of the complexities of discrimination experienced in both.

Since the 1980s, Crenshaw’s intersectionality has become used throughout many disciplines and continues to grow and expand, providing much-needed intersectional understandings of the complexities of discrimination.¹¹² I am utilizing Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality to capture the complexities of how Hupačasath̓ has been racialized in Canada as multiple racial definitions (Indian, Aboriginal, Indigenous) are applicable to Hupačasath̓ simultaneously, each having their own meanings, history, legalities, and other complexities and, therefore ,must be understood simultaneously to resist further colonization. Crenshaw’s intersectionality allowed me to show all of these layers at once. To me, this is the closest thing I have found in the academy that seeks to view things similarly to hiishuk ish tsawalk (a Nuučaañuł concept that translates into everything is one) and that delights me!

¹¹¹ Crenshaw, Kimberlé. “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.” *The University of Chicago Legal Forum*, vol 1989, Issue 1.

¹¹² For more on intersectionality see: Crenshaw, Kimberlé. *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*. New Press, 1995.

Indigenous Literature in Canada

In an unexpected twist, I spent all the years of my literary academic training studying whiteness. In order to study Indigenous literature, I had to study English literature. If you want to study whiteness, study English literature. I had to take courses from every time period of literature centred on white literary canons and criticism. It can be pretty much summed up as, we get it: y'all love being imperial, colonizing, fake deep writers who want out of England to find new things to look down upon. I would too with the no baths and the bear baiting and crimes against humanity. Making lit students gain a familiarity with old English to read old white literary texts is really twisted and peak whiteness. Does anyone need to read things like the *Canterbury Tales*, "Ode to a Grecian Urn" or *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*? The answer is a resounding god, no, but it did show me white culture, white worldviews, and white logics throughout an enormous period of time.

English Major (by James Perez Viernes)

They tell me to read
them good ol' boys
 billy shakespeare
 eddie poe
too many to name
the noise
of their canons
numbs my tired ears

that crave
MY good ol' boys
their stories cry out
from those years
nearly forgotten
 Grandma's jungle tales
 Grandpa's latte legends
they are my canon
their noise so sweet

No white words
No white paper
No white publisher

just brown “oral traditions”
or so they call them
but not any less than those
pages from the west.¹¹³

One of the white people texts I do love from my literary studies is *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett. The first time I read it I remember thinking there’s so few words on the page (aside from Lucky’s monologue of course), and yet there’s so much here. And very capable actors can translate that from word to stage. I love that Beckett made space on the page for the feelings of hope, despair, and waiting simultaneously. A lot of critics like to speculate it is written about World War II; however, Beckett himself never explicitly says what it is actually based upon. My reading of and experience of this play was that it always felt like what colonization feels like. Because Beckett was Irish, it is not outside the realm of possibility, there are at the very least elements of colonization in there. Beckett really captured the feeling of being in a limbo created by colonization. You’re not quite one thing or the other. You’re neither here nor there (in a liminal space). But you’re waiting, hoping, leaning on the one you’re with. I’ve wondered if this is why it has retained its popularity, because people find something in the absurdness that is familiar and alienating because colonialism and imperialism is all around them creating this similar place in real time. We are all subjects created for colonialism and imperialism, whether we recognize it or not. The humour (tragicomedy element) in this play also resonated deeply with me because humour is a central part of who we are as Nuučaañut people.

I would love to put on and direct a rez version of *Waiting for Godot*. Two uncles hanging out on a dirt road on the rez, debating and contemplating whether or not they should leave the rez, all the while waiting on a white man. And then an Indian Agent (Pozzo) comes along. One of the uncles is wearing cowboy boots that he finds uncomfortable and fiddles with, as well as wrangler jeans and a cowboy hat with a beaded rim and feather in it.

¹¹³ Viernes, James Perez. “English Major.” *Indigenous literatures from Micronesia*. Edited by Evelyn Flores and Emelihter Kihleng. University of Hawaii Press, 2019.

I hope that a place our people will always look to is literature. Works written by First Nations authors are why I've trekked through the still murky swamps that make up the very white field of literature. Every book I've found that I loved I have put into my bag and carried in my arms as I've made my way through. You see some of these works throughout these pages.

Indigenous literature has documented Indigenous lived experiences in a way no other discipline has. It has documented colonization, resistance to it, and the continuation of our nations. It has blurred the lines between genres and disciplines. The start of Indigenous literature in Canada is something that can be debated. If you're using a nation-specific approach that considers the start of their literature when they were reproducing what they would consider literature through forms (such as songs, dances, art,) that date could begin thousands of years ago, if not longer. If you're looking at it from an Indigenous-nationalist literary approach, the first native-authored works published in Canada were George Copway's *The Life, History and Travels of Kah-ge-gah-Bowh* published in 1847 and E. Pauline Johnson, who is credited with the starting of Indigenous literature as her work, was widely published and received international recognition. Her first published work was in 1883 when her poem "My Little Jean" was published in *Gems of Poetry* magazine in New York. Her first book was published in 1895, entitled *The White Wampum*.

Indigenous authors were not widely read nor published until the 1970s following the rise of Indigenous nationalism from movements, such as the opposing of the 1969 White Paper. During the next two decades, the following Indigenous-authored books were published: Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* in 1973, *My Heart Soars* by Chief Dan George 1974, Lee Maracle's *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel* in 1975, *In Search of April Raintree* by Beatrice Mosionier in 1983 and Jeanette Armstrong's *Slash* in 1985. Not literary, but these notable Indigenous texts are important to mention because they were also published during this time: Harold Cardinal's *The Unjust Society* in 1969 and George Manuel *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* in 1975. In 1980, the first Indigenous-owned publisher Theytus Books was founded. The institutionalizing of Indigenous Literature as a discipline in Canada started in the 1990s following the Oka Movement. In his article, Sam McKegney adds onto this idea by highlighting that while Indigenous literary texts started being sporadically used and entire courses started being taught, it wasn't until the mid-2000s when both Indigenous literary texts and classes were more widely available across Canada. Also, in this article, he speaks to how writers of Indigenous literature also became critics who

contributed to the construction of the Indigenous literary field.¹¹⁴ To this day, “[o]ne of the most significant collections of criticism about Canadian Indigenous literatures, Armstrong’s *Looking at the Words of Our People* (1994), contains work entirely by Indigenous writers and scholars.”¹¹⁵

Three other texts of note are *From Oral to Written: A Celebration of Indigenous Literature in Canada, 1980–2010* by Tomson Highway (2017), *Introduction to Indigenous Literary Criticism in Canada* edited by Heather MacFarlane and Armand Garnet Ruffalo (2015), and *Indigenous Poetics in Canada* by Neal McLeod (2014). Tomson Highway’s book is a really neat collection as he provides summaries of each work of Indigenous Literature from 1980–2010. Not only is the first book to document all of these texts: it is an Indigenous writer interpreting these works and providing overviews of each of them. *Indigenous Poetics in Canada* edited by Neal McLeod is an important contribution to the field as it is the first theoretical book about Indigenous poetry in Canada. The articles within the collection have a few main themes, which are ancestral poetics, land, and language, along with colonization decolonization, survivance, and cultural resurgence. Ancestral poetics (such as song and dance) give Indigenous poetry a unique rhythm and structure. Another central theme in the text is poetics derived from the land and Indigenous Peoples’ relationship to the land. They speak to how land is an active participant in the creation of and throughout the content of the poem. Beeds and McLeod speak about the Cree language, worldview, and its relationship to poetics. They state that poetics are an element of the Cree language and worldview and, as Beeds says, “[T]hey re-Cree-ate English with nehiyaw-itapisiwin (Cree way of seeing/world view), shape-shifting English textual bodies” (61). Cree worldview and language dictates how Crees use and understand the English language and therefore what they create with it. McLeod reminds of the importance of responsibility we have to our nations when he says, “[b]ecause of this connection to other generations, there emerges an ethical dimension to Cree poetic discourse, namely, the moral responsibility to remember” (McLeod 91). Indigenous poetry is a communal space that includes ancestors, land, and future generations.

Another area of the field that cannot go without mention is what Niigaan Sinclair calls American-centrism in the field of Indigenous Literature in Canada. The Indigenous literature field in Canada is arguably reliant upon Indigenous literary criticism from the US. Texts from the US

¹¹⁴ McKegney Sam. “Beyond Continuance: Criticism of Indigenous Literatures in Canada.” *The Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literature*. Edited by James H. Cox and Daniel Heath Justice. Oxford University Press, 2014. (412–413).

¹¹⁵ Cariou, Warren. “Indigenous Literature and Other Verbal Arts, Canada (1960-2012).” *The Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literature*. Edited by James H. Cox and Daniel Heath Justice. Oxford University Press, 2014. 577-588.

Native American literary canon are continuously a part of the canon of Indigenous literature in Canada, such as *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (1999), *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective* (2008), *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (1994), and *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies* (2012). The Canada-US border is a colonial creation and not recognized by most Indigenous peoples on both sides of the border. This relationship between Indigenous literature in Canada and Native American literature in the US reflects the beliefs about the border. Same with Indigenous Studies. You also find Indigenous writers from Canada and the US in a lot of anthologies and collections. It's really made me wonder: what would looking at Indigenous Literature in Canada actually look like without anything from Indigenous writers in the US. However, that then begs the question: is that even possible and could you responsibly answer that without reinforcing colonial borders? With the institutionalizing of the field of Indigenous Literature only a couple decades old, how will transnational Indigenous literary movements impact answering what is Indigenous Literature in Canada?

Since starting graduate school (all those years ago), my research has always been guided by the question, "What is Indigenous literature?" I still don't have an answer to that question, as this dissertation shows it is very complex and varied in both individuals and nations, and the field also does not have sufficient answers. And now the field of Indigenous literature in Canada is also a part of a larger global Indigenous literary field. I think this can both further muddy the waters of racialization as well as provide us with new worldviews and tools to study our field and, in particular, to decolonize our field. My focus has always been on the discipline and not the stories (literature). I wanted to understand why our literature and literary criticism were expected to conform to multiple and simultaneous forms of whiteness in both content and structure in what was supposed to be an Indigenous space. I have now come to understand that Indigenous literature is a colonized space that is centred on whiteness and urban-centrism. Indigenous literature in Canada has a whiteness problem, and we need to talk about it.

My question now is how do self-identification and the Indian Act shape the field of Indigenous Literary Studies. (Also, how does racialization function within the field? What are we doing to decolonize and combat further racialization?). How do we as First Nations people use Indigenous, Indian, Aboriginal, Native, etc.? What assumptions are made about the meaning of the terms when we apply them to ourselves and others? From the academy to households to community halls to academic and political ones, and everything in between, we are all contributing to how Indigeneity is being racially, socially, and politically constructed and performed. We as Indigenous academics need to be looking critically at how we are creating,

defining, and redefining terms and how those words impact native identity, especially in our fields.

The focus of the previous generations of Indigenous scholars has been creating a space in the field of literature by asserting Indigenous literature as a valid form of literature as well as developing Indigenous literary theory and criticism. As new generations of Indigenous literature scholars emerge, the needs of the field are shifting. Movements of decolonizing and Indigenizing of western disciplines have been occurring; however, these movements have not yet been applied extensively to Indigenous literature. In the field of Indigenous literary studies, as well as other Indigenous academic spaces, we need a restructuring of the field where, instead of continuing to build from discourses of racism, imperialism, and colonialism, we break down those logics of discourse and academic structures and build longhouses (or your nations' equivalent) instead.

Where I come from, everything is supposed to start with introducing yourself. You would begin by explaining who you are, who your family is, where you come from, and how you know what you know. Many Indigenous scholars write about the importance of storytelling in our academic practices. Leslie Marmon Silko speaks to the importance of relationality and reciprocity of the storyteller and listener that happens through the art of our storytelling, which draws the story out of the listener.¹¹⁶ Dian Million and Lee Maracle both say that our stories (especially oratories)¹¹⁷ are theories that decentre western delusions of objectivity in the creation of scholarship.¹¹⁸ Joanne Archibald describes storytelling as a decolonial approach that teaches not only to the mind but body, heart, and spirit too.¹¹⁹ Telling the stories of who we are, where we come from, and how we have come to know what we do will help to decentre and decolonize whiteness in the field of Indigenous Literary Studies. You could look at us as Indigenous Literary scholars as a community, and in *Huihui: Navigating Art and Literature in the Pacific* the editors say, “a community is a fabric woven together with stories— stories that give life to a people by conveying their history, culture, struggles, and resilience.”¹²⁰ Weaving our stories into the field allows us insight into how the field has been designed and the history and context of the designs we weave and leave behind in our scholarship. This is my story, and this is what I bring when I

¹¹⁶ Silko, Leslie Marmon. “Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective.” *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, vol. 208, 2006, pp. 261–342.

¹¹⁷ Maracle, Lee. *Oratory: Coming to Theory*. Gallerie Publications, 1990.

¹¹⁸ Million, Dian. “*There Is a River in Me*.” In *Theorizing Native Studies*, edited by Audra Simpson, Duke University Press, 2014.

¹¹⁹ Archibald, Jo-Ann. *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body and Spirit*. UBC Press, 2008.

¹²⁰ Carroll, Jeffrey, Brandy Nālani McDougall, and Georganne Nordstrom. *Huihui: Navigating Art and Literature in the Pacific*. University of Hawaii Press, 2014. 9–10.

come into the field of Indigenous Literary Studies. Every page in here is woven into everything I create. What's your story? (Non-Indigenous people this includes you also).

Long Way From Home (Emma Larocque)

I've walked these hallways
a long time now
hallways held up by
stale smoke
thoughts

I've walked these hallways
a long time now
hallways pallored by
ivory-coloured
thoughts

I've walked these hallways
for a long time now
hallways without windows
no way to feel the wind
no way to touch the earth
no way to see

I've walked these hallways
a long time now
every September closed doors
stand at attention
like soldiers
guarding fellow inmates
guarding footnotes
guarding biases

as I walk by

I do my footnotes so well
nobody knows where I come from
hallways without sun

the ologists can't see
they count mainstreet
bodies behind bars
they put Ama's moosebones
behind glass
they tell savage stories
in anthropology Cree

My fellow inmates
they paste us prehistoric
standing in front of us
as if I am not there too
as if I wouldn't know
what they think they show
showing what they don't know
they don't know what they show
they take my Cree for their PhDs
like Le Bank
as my Bapa would say
they take our money for their pay

When I first came to these hallways
I was young and dreaming
to make a difference
thinking truth

With footnotes pen paper
chalk blackboard
I tried to put faces
behind cigar store glazes
I tried to put names
behind the stats
of us brown people
us
us brown people
in jails
in offices
in graveyards

in livingrooms
but to them it was
just Native biases

I've walked these hallways
a long time now
hallways hallowed by
ivory-towered
bents

way too long now
hallways whitewashed with
committee meetings memos
promotion procedures
as fair as war
pitting brown against colonized brown
choosing pretend Indians

When I first came to these hallways
I was young and dreaming
to make a difference

but only time has passed
taking my Ama and Bapa
my Nhisis my Nokom
my blueberry hills

I've walked these hallways
a long time now
I wanna go home now
I'm tired of thinking for others
who don't wanna hear anyways.¹²¹

¹²¹ Larocque, Emma. "Long Way From Home." *Native Poetry in Canada: A Contemporary Anthology*. Edited by Armstrong, Jeannette C., and Lally Grauer. Broadview Press, 2001. 159–161.

Indigenous Poetry

To me, Indigenous poetry is the most Indigenous form of expression available upon the page. Cree literary scholar Neal McLeod says, “Indigenous poetics is the embodiment of Indigenous consciousness.”¹²²



This photo captures the multiple forms of poetics I grew up inheriting, practicing, and learning to understand.¹²³ The beat of the drum, the words, and beat of the song, the dance that was a part of it, as well as my beaded shawl and woven headband. Growing up, poetics were all around me. I wanted this dissertation to be like poetry: open spaces on the page with select words laid throughout like islands in the sea. I don't want my words to hide beneath pages and pages of words lined up back-to-back in stacks of paragraphs, like rush hour in a city seen from overhead. Poetry is also at the heart of this dissertation. Poetry is my greatest

¹²² McLeod, Neal. *Indigenous Poetics in Canada*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2014. Page 4. I want to acknowledge that Neal McLeod was convicted for violence against his wife, and I do not include this to diminish what happened to his wife or to endorse the use of his work anyways. I use him because he is one of the only First Nations scholars who writes about Indigenous Poetry in Canada. I know the power in citational violence, and I did look for alternatives. I did not include Neal McLeod's works lightly.

¹²³ Unknown Photographer. Alana Dancing in Regalia at Haa Huu Payak School. Date Unknown. Sayers Family Archives.

teacher. Poetry shaped this dissertation. The work of Jordan Abel, Joshua Whitehead, and Craig Santos Perez were my biggest sources of inspiration for the poetic structure of this dissertation. Their work pushes bounds and blurs lines between genres and medium and the borders of racialization. This is what I had hoped to capture in this dissertation.

Written knowledge is an essential component of both colonization and imperialism as Western discourse defines what is considered truth and knowledge, and it is needed for control and order in the colonizing system.¹²⁴ If I asked you to show me discourse with your body, what would you do? If I asked you to paint it, what would you paint? How would you communicate knowledge and discourse to me if words were not allowed? Do Western knowledge and discourse exist if they cannot be expressed through words? Indigenous oral and performative knowledges are delegitimized because they cannot be contained and controlled by the nation states that occupy our territories. Indigenous poetry is able to exist in multiple forms at once, on and off the page, which allows for the continuation of our poetic forms of Indigenous knowledge expression that have existed since time immemorial. It is visual and vocal while also eliciting responses from the remaining senses for a multi-sensory experience. Indigenous poetry carries forward generational knowledge in what I would argue is the most Indigenous form of knowledge expression in academia. However, it is not typically considered or utilized, as a bearer of history, truth, or discourse like the works of Indigenous people in other academic disciplines but Indigenous poetry is knowledge. The poems I have selected to share with you here have been some of my biggest teachers, friends, whose pages I frequently turn to. They stand alongside everything else in here in equal measure.

In her book *Writing as Witness: Essay and Talk*, Beth Brant speaks about the power of native women writers, and in particular, poets. She says poetry in the hands of native women writers tears it away from white male writers and returns it to the lyrical singing of the drum, the turtle rattle, and Mother Earth.¹²⁵ She also says,

In our long and complicated history with the European invaders, our story was stolen and made over into a tale that was palatable to them, the thieves who wished to eradicate all memory of us, who wished to eradicate our memory. I believe that memory is like the drum, one tap and the sound resonates and

¹²⁴ In *The Discourse on Language*, Michel Foucault's says discourse is a social system that produces knowledge and meaning as well as the objects of which they speak. He says power relations are embedded within the construction and consumption of discourse and used to control subjects.

¹²⁵ Brant, Beth. *Writing as Witness: Essay and Talk*. Women's Press, 1994. 12.

reverberates into our very soul. One poem, one story, one painting, and our hearts and bodies respond to the message – we are here. We remember.¹²⁶

Indigenous poetry weaves in strands of generational oral and performative knowledge that is not visible to everyone. It has allowed our ancestors to leave us ways to pull ourselves out of the sea of colonialism and see ourselves again outside of it. Joy Harjo says that our poetry has ancestors and a genealogy, and our understanding of those ancestors and connections deepens their meanings and the knowledge they carry.¹²⁷ Both Brant and Harjo speak to the power held within Indigenous poetry that connect us with all beings, past and present. I was born into a world of poetry that comes from tupał (the ocean). The ocean in her very being is poetry, and I carry these poetics within me. It makes poetry the best way I know how to speak to our world and have our world speak back to me. Lee Maracle describes “the value of orally remembered word art (sti?lem) is that each story, each poem, builds upon the original song and original story, and serves to deepen the values of the people.”¹²⁸ Indigenous poetry is a legitimate form of knowledge because it allows us to take a step back from Western knowledge and discourse by decentring whiteness, moving beyond a colonized consciousness, and through the creating of new ways of thinking and being. Imagine with me, what kind of knowledge and discourse could be produced if positioned within Indigenous poetics. In our poems, knowledge and discourse are not something to be achieved and measured; they are something that exists around us and within us and defies definition in a colonial context. Indigenous poetry will teach you in these pages.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Ibid 36.

¹²⁷ Harjo, Joy. *Ancestors: A Mapping of Indigenous Poetry and Poets*. Poets.Org. <https://poets.org/text/ancestors-mapping-indigenous-poetry-and-poets>

¹²⁸ Maracle, Lee, and Smaro Kamboureli. *Memory Serves : Oratories*. NeWest Press, 2015. 170.

¹²⁹ There are poems that are written by BIPOC poets also.

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