

Indigenous Voices on the Moral and Ethical Horizon of the Land: A Contextualized Land Acknowledgement

**Leanne Poitras Kelly, Mona Lisa Bourque
Bearskin, Lisa Perley-Dutcher, Bernice Downey,
and Christina Chakanyuka**

“TOWARD A MORAL HORIZON” SEEMS A FITTING TITLE as we begin this ethical exploration together. Gazing towards a metaphorical horizon must also include the conspicuous land horizon on which so many of these ethical issues arise.

In this era of what settlers have termed “reconciliation,” Indigenous communities are asserting their own critiques of conciliatory discourse, invitations to the power tables, and yes, the creation and inclusion of land acknowledgements within our institutions. Those critiques are complex. Creating a land acknowledgement can be an empowering and a supportive strategy to elevate and advance original land stewardship and Indigenous community recognition. It can also be performative and used as a tool to bypass real engagement with community issues.

To locate oneself with authenticity in a land acknowledgement, we assert that truth must precede reconciliation discourse. Those who truly wish to reconcile must first recognize the truth that the land on which we work, live, and play is inherently Indigenous land. It is our moral and ethical responsibility to recognize and articulate our relationship to this truth.

Settler pursuit of economic gains through the use of this land and its resources bears witness to Indigenous exclusion. Indigenous communities experienced social, political, economic, and cultural segregation. Our ancestors faced urgency for survival when confronted with the power of European settlement, creation of Treaties, and the mechanisms of coercion and imposed community controls. As a collective, Canadians all live under these Treaties and agreements, which place parameters unique to Indigenous Peoples that go beyond “equity, diversity, and inclusion” initiatives. We are all involved in a relationship sculpted through colonization that needs to be made whole through restitution and justice.

Yet, Indigenous communities persist, despite all acts of oppression and attempts at genocide. Indigenous Peoples and communities know the power of resistance, ceremony, relationship, and solidarity, and the power of our Earth Mother. We are all connected, and what we do to our land, we do to ourselves and each other. Our stories have existed through our ancestors since time immemorial. Our resilience demonstrates our reliance on the gifts of ancestral strength, blood memory, and willingness to reach beyond socially constructed barriers. Our stories are foundational stories of Canada.

Acknowledging the past and current relationships with Indigenous Peoples is part of an ethical awakening that goes beyond reciting a well-crafted and well-intentioned land acknowledgement. We acknowledge that there is much work to do, and that Indigenous people cannot labour alone, nor remain invisible to mainstream society. Nurse leaders have a role to play in creating a moral horizon that is more equitable and ethical. We encourage readers of this book to begin embodying this relationship by creating their own land acknowledgement founded in their own inquiry and pursuit of justice.

The writers of this acknowledgement are located across this land on unceded and unsurrendered Wolastoqey territory, unceded and occupied Stz'uminus territory, unceded and occupied territory of the T'kuḡlups te Secwepemc, and the unceded and occupied territory of the Chippewa, Odawa, Potawatomi and Delaware, and Oneida Nations. As a collaboration of five Indigenous nurse scholars, we acknowledge the great expanse of this land now called Canada. Using our collaborative Indigenous nurse voices, we invite readers to investigate their own relationship to the land. We encourage readers to interrogate assumptions shaped by patriarchy and colonialism and to pursue authentic engagement and relationships with Indigenous people and community issues based on intentional inquiry, honesty, humility, and respect.

The editors of this book reside on the occupied and unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations and the W'SANEC, Esquimalt and Songhees First Nations. The supporting educational institution, the University of Victoria, is located on unceded and occupied territory of the Coast Salish, specifically the communities of the W'SANEC, Esquimalt, and Songhees Peoples. This land historically held village sites that reached beyond the land borders created by the Indian Act and federal government allocations. The Coast Salish Peoples continue to live and have relationships with other Vancouver Island First Nations, settler communities, and beyond. Throughout Canada, Indigenous Peoples maintain their connection to the land and language and persist in their claim to the resources of their traditional territories and their right to prosper and flourish as we look toward this moral horizon.