

Upholding Indigenous Economic Relationships

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1

Grounding Methods

AS I WRITE THESE WORDS, I look out the window of my apartment onto the bend in the North Saskatchewan River. kisiskâciwani-sípiy ᥫꝝꝚbꝚꝛ·σꝚꝛ, swift-flowing river, is created from the joining of the North and South Saskatchewan Rivers with its headwaters beginning in the Rocky Mountains (Newton 2009). It is the kisepísim ᥫꝝꝚ, Great moon month, January in 2016, and the river is frozen, yet still alive. The banks of the river tell an archaeological and geological tale. The river has an ancient history, and yet it is still carving spaces in the present; so, too, are the Cree and other Indigenous peoples. Like my people, this river has witnessed many changes, and yet constants remain. In this work I draw from the time-honoured words of the past that still flow into our collective presents and futures.

The North Saskatchewan River flowed through nohkom's (grandmother's) blood too. I had the good fortune to live with my maternal grandmother as a teenager and as a young adult. My maternal grandmother, Lillian, and grandfather, Gilbert Wuttunee, were born in Red Pheasant Cree First Nation, in Saskatchewan (Treaty Six territory). My grandmother was born in 1914 and my grandfather in 1892. We belong to the sípiwiyiniwak ᥫꝝꝚꝛσꝚꝛ, the River Cree, with the North Saskatchewan River being part of our identity. My mother taped an oral account of Lillian in 1993, and these are my grandmother's own words:

My father's mother, Marie, first taught me to set snares. She was the younger of the two sisters that my grandfather had for wives before

he died in 1904. When the missionaries came to the reserve, he was told he could only keep one wife, and so Marie moved into a separate house. It was behind my parents' home, but when it caught fire and burned down, she moved in with us.

I used to follow behind her as she gathered medicines and listen as she told me what they were used for. I was very young and can only recall her saying, ayikotâsimá (this is frogs' pants) and this is good medicine. She would wrap the different medicines in a little calico cloth and just by smell alone she could tell the names of the different roots and herbs. She also used to dig for Seneca roots, which she would tell me she was going to sell to Chinese people. Having been taught to taste the leaves and barks on the bushes of the berries we picked, I could tell you blindfolded a chokecherry from a raspberry or Saskatoon bush. (L. Wuttunee 1993)

My grandmother, Lillian Wuttunee ([Figure 2](#)), chose to record these words, this account, and numerous others for her descendants. She understood the importance of natural medicines, and the knowledge her own ohkomimâw D^hđ^hđ^h (grandmother) carried as a Cree woman. Her stories connect five generations of Cree women, linking my great-great-nohkom Marie's story to my own. I am proud to carry Marie's name as my middle name.¹



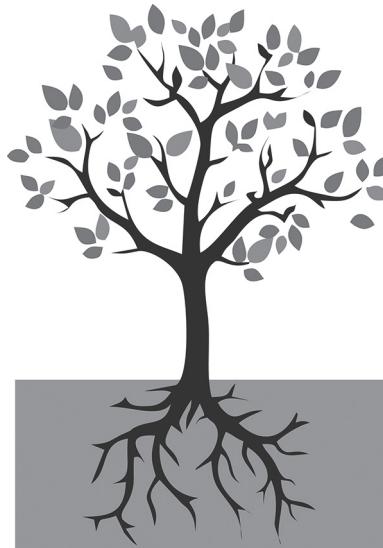
2 Lillian Wuttunee with her daughters in Saskatchewan, 1986. From left to right: Loretta (née Wuttunee) Jobin, Mary Wuttunee, Elsie Wuttunee, Lillian Wuttunee, Amy (née Wuttunee) Eustergerling, and Yvonne Wuttunee.

My grandmother told me stories about trade with non-Cree people, including relationships with animals and other nonhuman beings (for example, plants). Lillian's words bring to the forefront a different form of teaching and learning. These teachings stem from her Cree knowledge, her connection to the land, and her identity as a woman. Lillian's oral history speaks to her resistance to assimilation and the importance of passing down her knowledge to us as a way to reclaim Cree teachings. Her full account conveys the importance of harvesting and hunting, and how these practices were cultivated in her from a young age.

When I was in my twenties, I asked my nohcâwîs ᓂᐹᐳ·ⁿ (my “little father,” or uncle),² Winston Wuttunee, to explain the concept of self-determination in the Cree language. He explained it as nehiyaw-askiy ᓇᐱyaw-askiy , with the root being newo newo , or the word for “four” in the Cree language. askiy askiy is the Cree word for “the land.” He explained that we are the four-spirited people of the land, and that self-determination means we are able to live out our roles and the responsibilities that we have to the air, water, earth, and animal kingdom (W. Wuttunee 2003). When I use the term “land” in this study, I am referring to the air, water, earth (including trees, etc.), and animals. In this view, self-determination is intimately linked to our connections to the land. Another aspect of the Cree view of the world is that the land, water, trees, and so on – which I refer to as nonhuman beings – are all considered alive, and that we live in reciprocal relationships not only with people and animals, but also with the landscape and waterscape.³ These relationships are demonstrated within Cree stories. I explore this through a nehiyawak peoplehood process.

nehiyawak ᓇᐱyaw- Peoplehood Methodology

At every step in this research, the stories I write about bring a different lens to my project. The Indigenous methodology, the archival research, the oral histories, and the interviews, for example, present different interlocking perspectives on my study. As if looking into a river from different vantage points, when I envision Cree economic thought through oral histories, I see an intricate pattern of practices guiding these relationships with all living beings. Stand in another place with the archival research, and the complexities of twentieth- and twenty-first-century lives come into play. Moving to a third vantage point, in the interviews with knowledge holders I see the landscape of resurgence. From these vantage points, I begin to see the ways



3 One metaphor of Indigenous research.

in which individual life stories and community practice, grounded in history and consciousness, evolve from a series of choices – individual and collective choices made against the landscapes and waterscapes of Indigenous territory. Like a river, our picture of Cree economic relationships and their connection to the land shimmers into new focus every time we change the line of sight. Each angle yields an image that seems sharp, detailed, and complete, but there are many such sites on a river, none of which fully registers all the elements of its beauty.

In Figure 3, we see the roots of a tree representing Indigenous world views (ontology).⁴ From there we can see the trunk of the tree representing a system of knowledge (epistemology). The methodology, the system of methods used for a study, is represented by the branch system. The leaves represent different methods, which can be seen as flowing all the way from the roots of the tree, and the tree roots are in relationship with other roots in a forest.

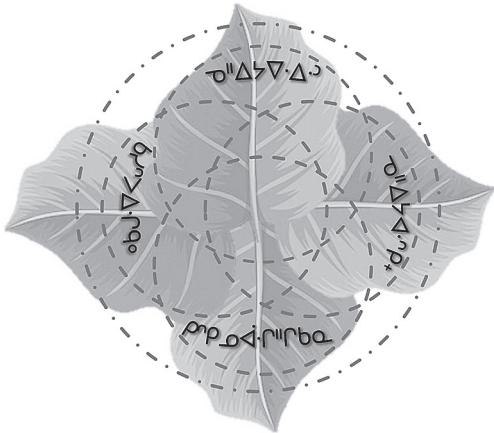
My goal is to share with readers the Cree knowledge holders' points of view, which they gifted to me. I explore oral traditions and examine secondary research with the purpose of identifying alternative Indigenous economic relations, relations that are not captured in characteristic understandings of Indigenous economic development. To do this, I use what I call a "nehiyawak peoplehood methodology," drawing on Indigenous

methodologies and Indigenous and non-Indigenous methods. A methodology can be seen in general terms as a process for gathering knowledge. The methodology we use answers the question of why we use certain methods and not others. A method could be completing interviews or a survey. I see the nehiyawak peoplehood methodology as one example of an Indigenous resurgent methodology.

Currently, innovative Indigenous research methods are being developed as part of a resurgent paradigm. I call these “resurgent methodologies” and “resurgent methods.” These methods focus on Indigenous peoples rebuilding their communities as part of the research process. I am conceptualizing the use of an Indigenous resurgent methodology, which draws from the peoplehood model (Holm, Pearson, and Chavis 2003; Jobin 2013). Cherokee Indigenous studies scholar Jeff Corntassel (2012, 89) explains that a “peoplehood model provides a useful way of thinking about the nature of everyday resurgence practices both personally and collectively. If one thinks of peoplehood as the interlocking features of language, homeland, ceremonial cycles, and sacred living histories, a disruption to any one of these practices threatens all aspects of everyday life.” An Indigenous resurgent methodology includes the development of innovative Indigenous research methods, in collaboration with Indigenous communities, that uphold Indigenous languages, Indigenous lands, Indigenous ceremonial cycles, and Indigenous living histories in the research process itself. In this way the process is constitutive of the societies we are rebuilding from a space that upholds those deeply rooted Indigenous knowledges.

I am grounding the peoplehood model in the nehiyawak Ꮣ"Δȟȟ·", the Cree, while also using this model as a methodological process. With settler colonialism, the four aspects of the lives of nehiyawak Ꮣ"Δȟȟ·" – language, territory, ceremonial cycles, and living histories – were disrupted. In the process of conducting research for this project, I interacted with these four aspects as I gathered knowledge.

I developed [Figure 4](#), which displays the different elements within the nehiyawak Ꮣ"Δȟȟ·" peoplehood methodology, to show the interconnection among the four elements. The overlapping circles and dotted lines illustrate this interconnection. I chose a dotted background to convey further the connections among all spheres. The leaves are discussed more in the conceptual framework (see [Figure 6](#)). In the north is nehiyawewin, which is the Cree language. For nehiyawewin, I use both standard roman orthography (SRO) and syllabics in the Plains Y dialect. In SRO the consensus is



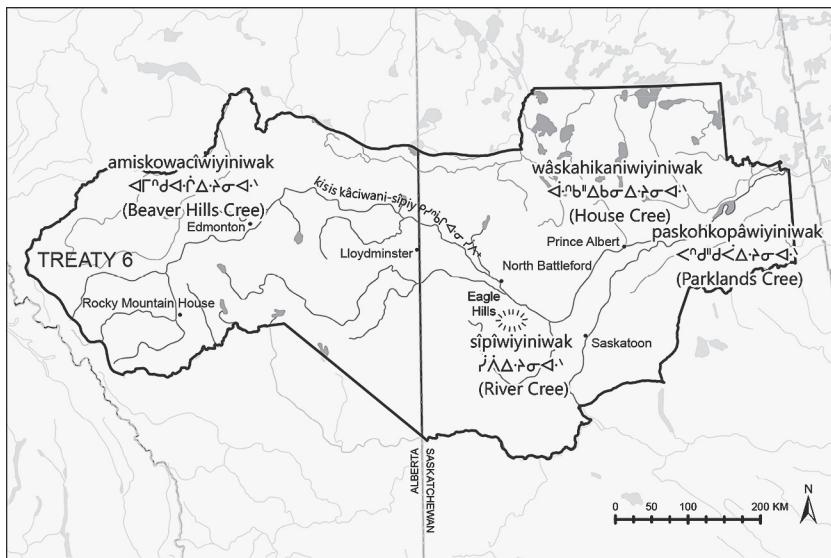
4 A nehiyawak ᒋ"Δᓈᐸ" peoplehood methodology.

to never capitalize (see Okimāsis and Wolvengrey 2008).⁵ In the east is nehiyawaskiy, or Cree territory. The south represents ceremonies, kiskinowâcîhcikana. The west is kasispowicikew, meaning “bringing the past to the future.” Throughout this project, I drew from these four elements, which formed the foundation of the methodology for my gathering of knowledge.

I focus on paskwâiyiniw <ŋb·Δ·ñσ° (Plains Cree) knowledge, specifically that of the natimîwiyiniwak ᐊ尼提威伊尼瓦克 (Upstream People). The Upstream People have nested layers of governance and regional groupings within this larger grouping, including:

- the amiskowacîwiyiniwak ᐄጀᓪᐊᐧᐃᐧᐳᐧᐱᐧᐁᐧ (Beaver Hills Cree)
 - the sîpîwiyiniwak የጀᐧᐃᐧᐱᐧᐁᐧ (River Cree)
 - the paskohkopâwiyiniwak ²ጀ̄ጀጀ̄ᐱᐧᐁᐧ (Parklands Cree)
 - the wâskahikaniwiyiniwak ᑭጀ̄ጀጀ̄ጀጀ̄ᐱᐧᐁᐧ (House Cree).

The paskwáwiyiniw <ŋb·Δ·ŋσ° (Plains Cree) negotiated Treaty Six, a peace and friendship treaty, in 1876 with the British Crown. Treaty Six also includes the sakáwiyiniwak ንbΔ·ŋσ·d· (Northern Plains Cree), Nakoda, Nakawē, Dënesųłqıné, and other Indigenous peoples. Within these historical governance systems there are now over forty-five different First Nations' communities party to Treaty Six in central Saskatchewan and Alberta. As one example, Red Pheasant First Nation citizens include people who were



5 Map of the territory of the *natimîwiyiniwak* ᡥାତ୍ତାରୀସାଙ୍କୁ (Upstream People). | Cartographer Tracy Howlett.

historically from the *sîpîwiyiniwak* ଜାହାରୀସାଙ୍କୁ (River Cree). I interviewed *natimîwiyiniwak* ᡥାତ୍ତାରୀସାଙ୍କୁ (Upstream People) throughout Treaty Six in both Alberta and Saskatchewan and I introduce them by their connections to this historic governance system.

To locate the Upstream Plains Cree geographically, I have provided a map of the North Saskatchewan River and the Battle River (Figure 5).⁶ At the time Treaty Six was negotiated, the Alberta and Saskatchewan borders did not exist. On my mother's side, we belong to the *sîpîwiyiniwak* ଜାହାରୀସାଙ୍କୁ (River Cree); this connection to *kisiskâciwani-sípiy* ପର୍ଯ୍ୟବେଳୀସାଙ୍କୁ (the North Saskatchewan River system) forms part of our identity, as well as our being from the Eagle Hills. I grew up mostly in *amiskwaci-wâskahikan* ଅମିକ୍ୱାଚି-ଵାଶକାହିକାନ ଏବଂ ବାଲ୍ବାବିଆବ, Beaver Mountain House (Edmonton), and *kisiskâciwani-sípiy* ପର୍ଯ୍ୟବେଳୀସାଙ୍କୁ is what connects me to the places in Treaty Six that formed me.

Grounded Governance

You might ask why I am upholding this historic Plains Cree governance system. Sunney, from the *amiskowaciwyiniwak* ଅମିକ୍ୱାଚି-ଵାତ୍ତାରୀସାଙ୍କୁ (Beaver Hills Cree), shared with me the concept of *mônah-asiskiya* ଜାନାରୀଦାରୀ, meaning to dig at the dirt to create that bond or that endearment to one

another (see Chapter 7). As someone who tries to think deeply about Indigenous governance, I am intrigued by the genealogy of governance for Indigenous peoples – for example, how the First Nations band council system came along with the *Indian Act* system. As this is what our current generation has always known, it is helpful to dig at the ground a bit to uncover our connections, our wâhkôhtôwin ḥ̄'d̄'čā' (kinship).

In *Elder Brother and the Law of the People*, Plains Cree scholar Robert Innes convincingly argues that kinship is the best way to describe and define Indigenous peoples on the Plains. Specifically, he shows how we cannot underplay the importance of kinship in Plains band formation and continuation (Innes 2013, 70). He also provides historic documentation demonstrating how Indigenous groups in the northern plains were multi-ethnic groups along kinship lines established in the nehiyaw-pwat ᕁ"Δ᳚</, or Iron Alliance/Iron Confederacy, formed in the early 1800s and lasting until 1870 (60–61). The nehiyaw-pwat was a historic trade and military alliance between the Plains Cree, Assiniboine (Nakoda Sioux), Saulteaux (Nakawē), Métis, and Haudenosaunee who travelled west. Innes demonstrates how wîsahkecâhk Ḍ̄'i"q̄l̄x stories provide teachings around maintaining kinship roles and responsibilities, found within the larger historic legal system to maintain harmony in the family, camp, and community (37). The kinship practices found within Elder Brother stories help to explain how making kin with others, including through adoption and with people outside your own people group, fits within these philosophical principles (42).

Storytelling and Oral Histories

Storytelling as a methodology fits under the oral-history rubric. As Indigenous peoples often come from oral societies, storytelling honours an Indigenous world view and can be a useful decolonization technique that presents a counter-history to Canada's well-documented story:

Storytelling also taught us about resistance to colonialism – our people have resisted even when legislation attempted to assimilate our children. All stories have something to teach us. What is most important is to learn to listen [to], not simply hear, the words that storytellers have to share. Many stories from First Nations tell a counter-story to that of the documented history of First Nations in Canada. (Robina Thomas 2005, 241)

Beyond providing a counter-history, storytelling can be used as a medium through which to communicate rights and jurisdictional boundaries that have political impact (Robina Thomas 2005, 240). The literature on oral-history research discusses the power embedded within stories that enables communities “to give testimony to their collective ‘herstories’ and struggles” (L.T. Smith 2005, 89); inherent in stories are ontological teachings and empowering motivators for “transformative praxis” (L.T. Smith 2005, 89). Chamberlin and Vale (2010, para. 8) equate the work of scholars with storytelling: “We [scholars] tell old stories. And we make up new ones. We call the first teaching, and the second research; but whatever we call them, it puts us in an ancient tradition of elders, experts and eccentrics, telling tales and singing songs.”

There are different types of stories within Indigenous perspectives. Beyond providing a counter-history, storytelling can be used as a medium by which to decolonize our societies and rebuild them through a “self-conscious traditionalism” (Alfred 2008). As well, oral tradition in general should be seen as a social activity (Cruikshank 1998, 41) that gives us tools for living well today.

Part of my method for exploring Indigenous stories was inspired by the work of Val Napoleon and Hadley Friedland (2016) and their engagement with stories related to Indigenous legal traditions. They explain how they built on the work of Anishinaabe legal scholar John Borrows’s approach of retelling Indigenous stories as legal cases and using the case method used in law (Friedland and Napoleon 2015, 22; see Borrows 2002, 16–20). I draw from the understanding that these stories can be useful today, informing such different Indigenous governance practices as legal orders and economic relations. To understand Indigenous legal orders, Napoleon and Friedland (2016) apply an adapted version of a common-law instrument, the case-brief analysis and synthesis, to Indigenous stories. The results have produced a guide for understanding and articulating Indigenous legal orders. Indigenous communities have responded very favourably to engaging with their own legal orders through the knowledge held within their own stories. One way in which my method differs from that of Napoleon and Friedland’s is that, instead of using an adapted case-brief analysis, I draw from the principles of grounded theory,⁷ such that analytical categories emerge from within the stories. I believe the methods (stories, language, ceremonies, land-based, etc.) we use to gather knowledge are important, and so in this way, I see the nehiyawak peoplehood methodology as resurgent.

Over a six-month period in 2012, I collected and became familiar with over 160 Cree stories that could be characterized as sacred stories, legends, creation stories, historical accounts, and personal stories. I explored these stories in relation to Cree economic relationships, using grounded-theory software to track and code all words and concepts that had a connection to economic relationships. I initially coded these stories in the fall of 2012; then, in the spring and summer of 2013, I repeated this process, recoding the stories in an iterative process. The strength of grounded theory lies in how themes emerge from within the text. For example, the principle of reciprocity was referenced seventeen different times in thirteen stories or interviews. I did not use a scanning function to find these words; I simply read the stories over and over. This meant that, for instance, examples that referred to the concept or idea of reciprocity but did not use the specific word “reciprocity” were included. Another aspect of this process was developing the relationships among the concepts. In some cases I nested up to four levels of topics under one concept. Through a series of iterations, several themes emerged that became the focus of [Chapters 7 to 11](#).

My next step was to take my intuitive understanding and way of theorizing the historical data back to Cree knowledge holders for their feedback and guidance, and as a measure against which to understand their sense of how (and whether) these principles continue to guide Cree economic relationships. I also asked for guidance regarding what cultural or ceremonial knowledge should be shared in this work. A snowball technique was used to gather participants, whose responses and feedback were extremely valuable.⁸ I approached knowledge holders in each of the regions of the Upstream Plains Cree (the Beaver Hills Cree, the House Cree, the Parklands Cree, and the River Cree). I interviewed thirteen people, sometimes more than once; eight interviewees identified as women and five as men. Approximately half of the interviews were conducted in various Treaty Six areas of Saskatchewan and half in various Treaty Six areas of Alberta.

Pseudonyms are used to identify those interviewed. This was on the recommendation of two of the Elders interviewed, and with the agreement of all those interviewed. The interview subjects also chose their own pseudonyms. Sunney, one of the knowledge keepers interviewed, told me that he had previously been misrepresented by scholars; as a result, he was very cautious about interviews. Besides using a pseudonym, he and the others interviewed were given the opportunity to read through their own interview transcripts and the corresponding chapters to provide feedback. I began

each visit by offering protocol to the knowledge holder(s). The interviews I completed for the case study in Chapter 10 were an exception to the general rule of anonymity in this context, as the interview participants wanted to use their own names. They wanted their experiences to be part of the public record. Since the case study is about a specific initiative in a specific community, it would have been difficult to maintain confidentiality. Beyond the general ethics and protocols followed with each participant, I let each person guide me regarding extra steps for protocol, information validation, and reciprocity. Following this synthesis and refinement, I completed literature reviews, and that scholarship is included in the analysis.

During the summer of 2013, my first interview was with a Cree Elder named Paul, his wife, Elder Gail, and their daughter Sharlene. Elder Paul asked me to meet him at an annual Indigenous gathering where his family was camping at manitô sâkahikan Ὡσ᷑ ḫ᷑Δ᷑ (Creator's Lake or Lake of the Spirit). Having been at this event numerous times before, I knew that there would be thousands of people in attendance from Indigenous communities across Canada. I was concerned about the sound quality of the interview recording so the night before the interview, I went out and bought an expensive audio recorder device and spent a few hours learning how to use it. Once we sat down, I offered protocol and introduced myself, and after a bit of discussion I asked if I could use the recorder. He told me no, not to record the interview or write notes during the interview; gently scolding me, he reminded me that all I have is my mind. He continued by saying that I cannot take the recorder when I go up to the sky (while pointing upwards) and I have to use my mind and my heart. This was an important reminder for me to keep in the forefront of my mind throughout this project. He was asking me to really listen in a different way, not as we are often trained to do in Western academia. The stories he and his family shared were about relationships between humans, nonhuman beings, shape-shifters, and the spirit world.

In this book, I often record the date on which I was originally writing, stating which season it is within the cycle of a year; sometimes the years change within the same chapter, jumping forward in time and then going back. This demonstrates the cyclical nature of time and the cyclical nature of how I approached this study. I include the month I was writing using Cree terms of different moons. Opaskwayak Cree lodge holder and science educator Wilfred Buck (2018, 8) shares that historically many people in this area of the earth “read the passage of time through the lunar cycle,

our natural calendar. The lunar cycle consists of 13 full moons, with 28 days separating each full moon.”

Working with published stories is always a challenge, and also a potential limitation of this research. In an Indigenous oral-history approach, something is always lost in terms of contextualized and situated knowledge when a story is recorded. Significantly, settler men wrote some of the stories included here, and although they interviewed Cree informants, the researchers often ignored Cree women and did not understand or write about their complex economic relationships. Another issue with the published stories is that most of them are written entirely in English; the richness of the world view found in *nehiyawewin* ᓈᐸᒧᐹᐧᐃᓐ (Cree language) is lost. Interviewing Cree knowledge holders provided one way to overcome some of these challenges (I am not a fluent Plains Cree speaker, although I am learning and practising). I also tried to use oral stories that were written and published by Cree people themselves.

In Indigenous research, questions of ethics are of paramount importance. Ethical questions arose during all stages of the research process, and a self-reflective ethics is a continual process. How is the sacred honoured within Indigenous research? Ethical considerations regarding what is shared outside of the collective, as in a study, are commonly examined in Indigenous research (Kovach 2005, 31). This is a question I put to Cree knowledge holders. A piece of advice from Sharlene was to talk about the principles of a certain sacred ceremony without talking about some of its specific elements. Elder Gail said that with the changes facilitated by the Internet, the information is available anyway. In struggling through this question, I found the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations’ ethical considerations when publishing Cree oral stories informative:⁹

The legends in this book explain only the significance of the ceremonies to our culture; they do not reveal the various stages and steps that are followed in a ceremony. This knowledge is reserved for men [and women] who have received this right either through a vision or from an elder wishing to pass his knowledge on. (Cuthand, Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, and Deiter-McArthur 1987, xii)

Drawing from this understanding, in this study I share what I have learned regarding the importance of ceremonies, and I will show how this relates

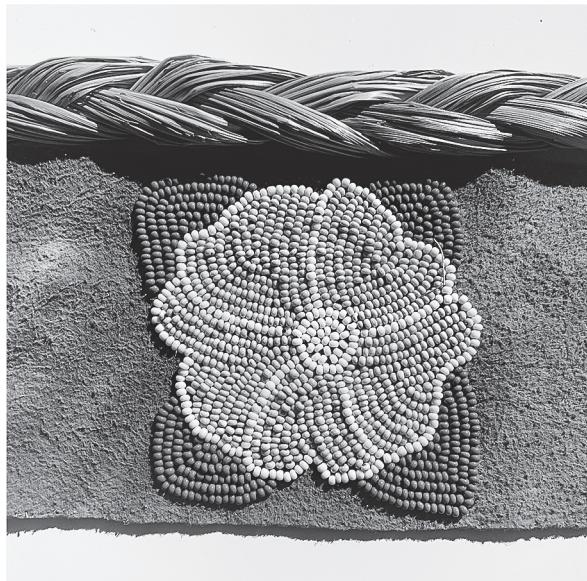
to economic relationships. I do not describe the sacred steps followed in the ceremonies. Where possible, I refer to accounts already published and already accessible to the wider public. It is always important to remember that Cree society is complex and dynamic.

nêhiyawak [Cree] culture is not easily analysed or summarised. As a fluid, ever-changing and evolving set of interconnected relationships and meanings, it cannot be succinctly described or condensed. Even if this were possible, the result would not represent the experiences of all nêhiyawak peoples at any given time, much less through time. That is to say, cultures are complex and multifaceted across both time and space. (Haggarty n.d.)

A Model for Economic Livelihood

In this book, I present Indigenous economic practices that uphold Indigenous economic relationships as envisioned through a livelihood economic model, or pimâcihowin $\wedge\text{L}^{\text{C}}\text{H}^{\text{D}}\Delta^{\text{C}}$. Cree scholar Priscilla Settee is an expert in Indigenous social economies, food sovereignty, and Indigenous livelihoods. She explains how “the community was governed by traditional Cree principles and standards of living known in Cree as *pimatisiwin*, which reflect ancient knowledge for community life, well-being and sharing values” (Settee 2011, 75). The root of *pimatisiwin* is *pimâtisi*, which means “to be alive” (75). In the book *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream Is That Our Peoples Will One Day Be Clearly Recognized as Nations* (H. Cardinal and Hildebrandt 2000), the Elders explain how the connection to land can be understood through the doctrines of *pimatisiwin*, which includes spiritual, physical, and economic realms. This core concept contains many theoretical subsets, including, among other things, the concept of *pimâcihowin*, which is defined as the ability to make a living.

When treaty Elders use the word “*pimâcihowin*” they are describing a holistic concept that includes a spiritual as well as a physical dimension. It is an integral component of traditional First Nations doctrines, laws, principles, values, and teachings regarding the sources of life, the responsibilities associated with them, including those elements seen as necessary for enhancing the spiritual components of life and those associated with making a living. (H. Cardinal and Hildebrant 2000, 43)



6 A metaphor of a livelihood economy.

This concept is intimately connected to *askîy* ᐊᐢ基 (the land) as an “important source of life for it provides those things required for the physical, material, and economic survival of the people” (H. Cardinal and Hildebrandt 2000, 43). The Elders then go on to explain different principles of conduct related to livelihood (see [Chapter 9](#)).

In a livelihood model, all elements are interconnected and interdependent, and all elements need to be considered and valued. I use the metaphor of a beaded *okinewâpikonew* ᐱᐙᓇᐦਪିକନେ (rose) that is original to the Plains geography to explain the *pimâcihowin* livelihood model that grounds this work. I beaded the flower in [Figure 6](#) in 2020 using some of my grandmother Lillian Wuttunee’s beads and home-tanned hide made in the Aseniwiche Winewak Nation (AWN); I explain our student-community project of making home-tanned hide in AWN in [Chapter 10](#) (see also Jobin et al. 2021). The act of beading can be seen as grounded governance and as an embodied practice connecting our grandmothers’ knowledges into the present (Kappo 2021). Michif artist, author, and activist Christi Belcourt (2007, 61) explains that all aspects of this specific rose can be used medicinally, and it is an excellent source of Vitamin C.¹⁰

Although my grandmother Lillian was a beader and I watched her bead while I grew up, I am only a beginner. The “mistakes” in the beading I chose

to leave as a reminder that the work is messy, and still important. In this model the centre of the flower is the pistil and stamen, which are androgynous in the okinewápike new ᐃᐦେପିକେ ନ୍ୟୁୱେ, including both the male and female reproductive system of a flower to ensure the continuation of life. The model also draws from the concept of wâhkohktôwin ᐊହକୋହତୁଵିନ (the normative principles guiding relationships) to acknowledge the important principles that stem from being related to all living beings. In the beaded okinewápike new, the innermost circle represents spirit beings (âtayohkan ᐊତ୍ୟୋହକାନ), the second circle represents all nonhuman beings (land, water, animals, and air beings), the third circle represents a people (for example, nehiyawak), the fourth circle represents other Indigenous peoples, and the fifth circle represents non-Indigenous peoples. When making economic decisions, a livelihood model reminds us of all our interconnected relations and how decisions will affect these relationships.

The five petals of the flower represent each of the different aspects of any society. Elder Elmer Ghostkeeper discusses how every society encompasses four aspects: social, cultural, economic, and political (Jobin and Letendre 2017, 9). For the purpose of this work, I have also included the legal aspect of a society; governance processes are embedded in all five aspects. Currently, Western economic thought can subsume all aspects of society within the economic sphere of capitalism. Figure 6 demonstrates the interconnection of all aspects; paradoxically, Western ways of being can also silo these aspects. In my research, I am interested in interconnections and making visible economic relationships – not to subsume, but to uphold Indigenous social, cultural, political, economic, and legal systems. Each bead represents principles and philosophy that uphold relationality within the nehiyawak world view.

The four leaves around the flower petals link economic relationships to movements toward Indigenous resurgence and self-determination. Sámi scholar Rauna Kuokkanen (2011, 230) explains that the most destructive impacts from the decimation of Indigenous economies are social and cultural. When looking at Indigenous economies today, we also need to include how economic relationships might uphold the elements of the peoplehood model. In Chapter 3 I explore the peoplehood model as an Indigenous studies theoretical paradigm (Corntassel 2012; Holm, Pearson, and Chavis 2003; Robert Thomas 1990). Specifically, it provides Indigenous peoples in settler-colonial contexts with areas to focus on for our continued survival as peoples, as well as suggesting resurgent acts of self-determination. These

include continuing our assertion of and relationship with Indigenous territory, reclaiming Indigenous language retention, knowing and transmitting Indigenous living histories, and living out the renewal responsibilities found in Indigenous ceremonial cycles. In this book I explore how an understanding of a livelihood economic model might enable the social, political, economic, legal, and cultural reproduction of our people while upholding our relationships to all living beings.

While I write this (in the ihkopiwi-pîsim Δ"dΔΔ· ḡꝫc, frost moon, November 2013), I am enjoying the gift of watching a fast-flowing river while I'm on a writing retreat. Yesterday I watched a bald eagle perched on a branch of a tree beside this river. At one point she swooped down, and I think she found food, as I could see her head grabbing at something. I am reminded of Indian scholar and activist Vandana Shiva's (2005) living economies and the important role of nature's economy within this. Whether we acknowledge it or not, economic relationships are occurring right outside our window. Just where the eagle was yesterday, a small deer has crossed the river, and when I walked to this spot this afternoon, I saw a school of salmon seeking the shallow gravel beds of the river to finish their epic journey. As a Cree Elder told me in one of my interviews, we can learn a fair bit through watching how our nonhuman relations behave. Their teachings can show us how to live in miyo-wîcihitowin ፳·ꝫ"Δ· (good relationships).

This research is also a contemporary Cree analysis of “alterNative” and enduring Indigenous economic relations within the Treaty Six geographic space.¹¹ Uncritical economic development affects Indigenous peoples in very specific ways, often revealing the contradictions and inherent problems within capitalistic systems. As an alternative, I discuss Indigenous economic relations that resist the economic exploitation found in settler-colonial countries such as Canada. When I use the term “enduring,” I am referring to the economic relationships that predate capitalism on this land and predate the Canadian state. By reimagining and rearticulating these types of economic relationships, I hope to help us understand exploitation in the economic realm critically and to link Indigenous economic resurgence and self-determination in ways that are useful for Cree society in the twenty-first century. In the following chapters, I delve further into a grounded critique of economic exploitation, and I also explore enduring nehiyawak economic relationships through a nehiyawak peoplehood methodology or process.

The chapters form an interpretive circle. Chapter 2 grounds the book by exploring Indigenous economies as they are described in the literature.

I unpack the concept of economic exploitation and then explore the area of Indigenous political economy and critical Indigenous political economy.

In [Chapter 3](#), I explore Cree ontological relationships through the approaches of oral history and storytelling. I lay the basis for understanding the Cree as a self-determining people who see themselves in terms as valid as (although distinct from) European notions of nationhood, partaking in international trade and foreign affairs. This articulation of Indigenous peoplehood positions Indigenous rights as *sui generis*, flowing from Cree peoplehood as opposed to being granted by the Canadian state or gaining authority only from within (or underneath) the Canadian state (Turner 2006). Articulating Cree peoplehood in this manner raises questions regarding the legitimacy of the “Canadian state’s unilateral claim of sovereignty over Aboriginal lands and peoples” (Turner 2006, 7). Historical understandings of Cree inter-nation trade practices provide insight into how to foster Indigenous economic resurgence and contribute to greater governance options for Indigenous peoples.

[Chapter 4](#) provides a genealogy documenting specific examples of exploitation that occurred during the fur-trade era, drawing on archival and academic sources to demonstrate the origin of this relationship. Much of what is now Canadian territory was purchased from the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) by the Canadian government through an order-in-council in 1870 (Tough 1992). The purchased lands had been stolen by the HBC from the Indigenous people who lived on them. Settler governments then dealt with Indigenous peoples, who continued to inhabit their stolen lands, partly through treaties into which the Indigenous parties entered in good faith, and in Treaty Six, through ceremonial commitments. But as the number of instances of settler governments breaking or disregarding treaty agreements grew, some question whether treaties were seen by settler states as simply international instruments designed to justify colonial pursuits. The “double-forked tongue” of the state, and its exploitation of peoples and territories, formed the foundation of the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canada that continues to this day.

Indigenous notions of identity through citizenship, and the extent to which these understandings are conditioned by neoliberalism, constitute the focus of [Chapter 5](#). In Indigenous views of citizenship, a reciprocal relationship between economic interactions (relations *to* land) and modes of subjectivity (relations *with* land) is often demonstrated. How we relate to the land has an impact on who we are and the types of responsibilities we

claim. In contrast, a neoliberal model can falsely assert that fundamentally altering our relationship to the land will not significantly alter who we are. I argue that negotiating current self-government initiatives that often free or open up Indigenous lands to be exploited by market interests enables one of the logics of settler colonialism: economic exploitation. Similarly, the focus on capitalist exploitation of the land as a way for Indigenous peoples to increase their financial independence from the state, although potentially relieving some bureaucratic control, further embeds this logic. This entrenchment influences identity formation – creating a type of market citizenship (Altamirano-Jiménez 2004, 350) and further subjection to this type of colonial logic. Countering this are Cree notions of identity and how such collective identity is connected to relations with the land.

[Chapter 6](#) examines specific impacts on Indigenous women in resource extraction regions. As principal participants in the subsistence economy, Indigenous women have felt the harmful effects of corporate globalization particularly keenly (Kuokkanen 2008, 217). Indigenous women's bodies are connected to the political, colonial, and neoliberal, as "The body is the first place where women experience exploitation as well as sexual and domestic violence" (Altamirano-Jiménez 2013, 65). In this chapter I look at the history of racism and colonialism linked to missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit + persons ("+" includes 2SLGBTQQIA: Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, and asexual people). A specific type of political culture and discourse emerges in resource extraction provinces, and I link this to the exploitation of lands and bodies.

After [Chapters 4, 5, and 6](#) unpack economic exploitation, the book shifts to examination of an Indigenous world view that upholds relationships to the land. [Chapter 7](#) explores Cree stories and oral histories. In this chapter I uphold, articulate, and theorize Cree economic relationships, principles, and traditions emerging from both recorded and archival stories and interviews with Cree knowledge holders. My intent is to show Cree economic relationships on their own terms, as they provide a guiding framework for Cree resistance to economic exploitation.

Colonial dissonance results from the breaking of wâhkôhtôwin ḳ̕d̕d̕č̕č̕, which affects the spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental aspects of Cree personhood and peoplehood; it is also the breaking of relationships between Cree people, non-Cree people, nonhuman beings, and spirit beings. Building on [Chapter 7](#), [Chapter 8](#) introduces the notion of

colonial dissonance as a way to understand the tensions resulting from not living out wâhkotowin ᐄ"j"Δ. Colonial dissonance theory demonstrates the myriad of impacts of colonialism to all spheres of Indigenous societies: social, cultural, political, legal, and economic.

[Chapter 9](#) discusses normative principles as explicated by interviews with Cree knowledge holders. Here I explore principles found in Cree knowledge systems that speak to Cree economic relationships and resistance to settler-colonial exploitation.

In Chapter 10 I bring the concepts from previous chapters together in order to theorize practices of resurgence. I show the tensions between economic exploitation and self-determination, and the form that resistance takes among the Plains Cree through examples of renewed relationships. This takes us to the specific ways in which the Cree are able to restore wâhkohtôwin ḫ̄j̄d̄j̄DΔ̄ through enduring and alternative economic relationships with Cree and non-Cree beings. Chapter 11, the concluding chapter, brings together the different aspects of the book through the lens of upholding relationships.

Just as one can look into a river from different vantage points, so there are different perspectives from which to look at Cree economic relationships. While gazing at the river I see even more how the different perspectives are based on the sets of eyes one has – whether one is an eagle looking for food, a doe not wanting to be swept away by the current, a salmon spawning in a river bed, or a nehiyaw iskwew Ꮓ"Δ᳚ ዳ"q·o (Cree woman) searching for the relationships that connect us all. The art on the cover of this book is from Christi Belcourt's work titled *This Painting is a Mirror*; she explains how it "reflects back to the viewer all the beauty that is already within them. We are not separate from anything, we are born connected to the earth, with the capacity to love, to be kind, to be generous, to be gentle" (Belcourt 2012). My hope is that an understanding of economic and governing relationships in living economies can lead to different approaches to these relationships, and that this could lead to ways in which we can live well with each other and with all of our relations.

2

Grounding Economic Relationships

SIXTY-EIGHT HOURS AGO, on February 9, 2018, a verdict of not guilty of second-degree murder – as well as not guilty of manslaughter – was delivered in the shooting death of twenty-two-year-old Colten Boushie, from Red Pheasant First Nation, by a white man named Gerald Stanley. The fact, not even disputed by Gerald Stanley, is that he shot and killed young Colten, and yet Stanley didn't even get convicted of the lesser charge of manslaughter for the careless use of a firearm. Indigenous peoples felt contradictory feelings at once, both shock and disbelief, but for some the verdict also confirmed the outcome they had dreaded.¹ Within hours, and in the days following, demonstrations and vigils were organized across the country. Thousands upon thousands of people participated in more than twelve cities and communities. The R v. Stanley case represents the intersections of race, colonialism, private property, the criminal justice system, and fractured relationships. This case is also connected to place: the eagle hills of Saskatchewan.

nimosôm σ\u20d7r̥ic (my Grandpa) Gilbert Wuttunee ([Figure 7](#)), was born on Red Pheasant First Nation in 1892, and he attended the Battleford Industrial (residential) School. Seven years before Gilbert was born, Battleford Industrial School made its students stand outside and watch the hangings of eight Cree warriors involved in the 1885 Frog Lake uprising. My grandpa was at one time a Cree translator in the Battleford courthouse. This is the same courthouse where I sat last week, listening to the legal proceedings of the Gerald Stanley trial and remembering my grandpa's words that my

mother transcribed. My grandpa Gilbert wrote these words in 1970 (the italics are mine):

At that time [with the first settlers], the only village in practically the whole of Western Canada was Battleford, the seat of Government of the NW Territories till in 1905 Saskatchewan and Alberta were made provinces with their own governments and capitals. When the country was opened up for homesteading, people from all over the world came to Battleford, where the land office was situated, to file their claims on land they had chosen. Once a claim was registered, there were certain duties by law to be done. The claimant, or homesteader, had to build a shack or house, live there [at least] 6 months for 3 years, plow and fence 10 acres of land, have some stock horses and cattle and poultry. These completed, the homesteader could go to the land office and claim title to his homestead.

There were several colonies of people who came from England, the Barr Colony, Germans, Russians, Ukrainians, Norwegians, Swedes and many other nationalities, but the English and Germans were the only ones that really stayed together from their arrival in Battleford. From Battleford they went in all directions to search for a homestead ...

The Germans and Ukrainians also formed settlements so they could be together. Such a place was Collenz (Leipsig), the name changed to Wolfe during the First World War. The Ukrainians and Russians also formed a settlement, a village called Cando, about 40 miles south from Battleford. The Germans came very late in the fall. The year was 1905 or 1906. There weren't enough houses in town to accommodate them, so they built a long house like the Iroquois long house, divided into sections for each family. The house was built with pine slabs from the sawmills. There was no way for them to go looking for land but south, into the open prairie.

As soon as spring break-up, they began their search for land and choosing districts to suit them. It must have been terrible for these people to go out into an absolutely uninhabited bald-headed prairie searching for land. Many homesteaded a hundred miles from any bush where they could cut logs for building and wood for fuel. They would drive a day or two to the bush for their winter's fuel. Many got lost and froze to death in the wintertime, losing their way in a blizzard. Many used fresh plowed sod to build their homes and barns. Sod houses

with no lumber for floors, rails and sod for roofs; yet, they stuck to it and became successful farmers. It wasn't very long before the whole country was dotted with sod-and-log shacks and land plowed and fenced.

The people were very friendly and hospitable. A traveller was made welcome day or night, if they happened to be travelling and needed shelter, food for the night. One knew and visited his neighbours for miles around, nothing like the present when you can live in the same building for years with people and yet not know who your neighbours are in the next room or house.

The homesteaders for miles adjacent to an Indian reserve became very friendly with the Indians, sharing in their sports, church and many social affairs, helping one another in building houses, log-houses, barns and fencing land. The Indians were an asset to these immigrants. Many didn't know anything about doing these things for themselves, nor did they have the material to work with. They went to the Indian for help and to be shown how to do these things for themselves.

It's too bad that the friendship that existed between the Indian and immigrant in the early colonization days should have deteriorated to such an extent that an Indian is barred from many public places, hotels, motels, cafes, etc., etc., and looked upon not as a second class citizen, but a non-entity, and [it is] a very rare occasion if an Indian is invited to a social event in a white man's home. The mutual confidence the Indians and whites had for one another has to be rebuilt if the Indian is to progress and become a real asset to the country and society in general.

The white men of today, 1970, haven't the liking and respect for the Indians that they had in the early part of this century.

It is like Grandpa is talking to us today, reminding us of a time when friendship and reciprocity guided the relationship between the Cree and the newcomers in the eagle hills, at a time when a traveller was made welcome day or night.

This book is about unpacking relationships between Plains Cree people and newcomers. Specifically, this book offers an Indigenous perspective on the economic realm. What is the relationship between Canada's "progress" and the exploitation of Indigenous peoples? What gifts are embedded in Indigenous world views to speak to miyo-pimâtsiwin, the good life, and, specifically, good relations related to the economy? In this book I present



7 nimosôm σɬ̓ic (Grandpa) Gilbert Wuttunee, nimosôm σɬ̓ic (Grand Uncle) Gavin Wuttunee, and nicâpân σɬ̓ic (Great Grandpa) James Wuttunee (n.d.).

two main arguments. The first is that economic exploitation was the first and most enduring relationship between newcomers and Indigenous peoples. This set the stage for settler colonialism to take hold. This important characterization has not been analyzed extensively enough. The second argument is that our economic relationships are constitutive; by this I mean that the relationships we have to the land, people, and other beings create and co-create who we are as individuals and as peoples. Indigenous peoples' options for achieving economic self-determination need to be attuned to the constitutive nature of these relationships. I draw from *nehiyawak* narratives to hold up Indigenous principles related to Cree livelihood that are embedded in our world view. I argue that these enduring principles are still of relevance today. Simply stated, the answer is not trading state colonialism for capitalist colonialism.

A changing economy has fundamentally altered relationships with *askiy* *ᐊᐢᑭ*, the land, broadly conceived. This change has different contours. One has to do with a shift from a subsistence and trade economy to capitalism and wage labour. This change has altered our relationships, prioritized waged labour, and changed our relationship from living *with* the land to making a living *off* the land (Ghostkeeper 2007). Tied to this are the particularly destructive aspects of resource extraction. Resource extraction has diminished everyone's ability to live at a subsistence level by decreasing wildlife populations and increasing harmful toxins found in the food system and

natural environment. This has left many Indigenous communities without adequate subsistence options. A subsistence livelihood is basic to the economy, but it is also intimately connected with social connections and cultural practices (Kuokkanen 2011). To state it another way, to lose the ability to live with the land has a major impact not only on the economy of a people (historically and currently), but also on its social system. Being able to maintain miyo-wicéhtowin ᒥዮ·ዊጀᐸጀ (good relationships) with the land has intrinsic value, even if the land, because of human impact, is no longer able to provide for all the people's subsistence needs.

A common public critique of Indigenous self-determination is that it is not feasible without economic independence from the settler state. This critique and the logics settlers use to try to govern Indigenous peoples serve to push Indigenous communities to look beyond themselves for economic development initiatives that might promise a stronger capital portfolio. This has led to radical transformations for Indigenous peoples, who find themselves increasingly governed from the outside and by the logic of the global market. This story is being told. What has not been fully explored is the Indigenous-nation-specific dissonance that is deeply rooted in settler economic exploitation, and corresponding acts of discord, refusal, and resistance. The duality entailed in revitalizing Indigenous economic relationships, in the context of Indigenous resistance to economic exploitation, has a logic of its own. That logic is the subject of this study. Most non-Indigenous Canadians do not understand this logic underpinning Indigenous resistance. Therefore, this study might be of interest for Canadians to understand an Indigenous world view that underpins Indigenous dissonance and resistance.

The intervention provided by this study is grounded in dual concepts. It is at once a critique of unexamined economic development in a Plains Cree context, and also a narrative that foregrounds accounts of Cree-centred acts of wâhkohtôwin ᐊ·ዑጀ, the normative principles guiding relationships, that serve as resistance to these logics. Although this study focuses on one Indigenous people, it is my hope that other Indigenous peoples will see value in the method of drawing from wisdom within their own oral traditions or other resurgent methods (land-based, ceremonial cycle, language, etc.) to revitalize their economic relationships.

Stated in another way: the nehiyawak ᓂᐤᐱጀ (Cree people), whose knowledge systems I draw upon, have distinctive governing relationships

that shape their economic behaviour. In this book, I ask this question: What are the economic relationships that nehiyawak Ꮓ"Δᓇᐱ" hold dear? Drawing on Cree narratives from the past, and those of present-day Plains Cree knowledge holders,² this study is a treatise on Indigenous economic relations, practices, and principles. I explore Indigenous economic relationships through both historical and ongoing practices of economic exploitation in settler colonialism, and I bring to light central principles inherent in Indigenous economic relationships. These principles are drawn from historical practices and include oral histories from our archives and current oral narratives. My goal is to bring these integral relationships to the forefront in order to look at economic exploitation and the processes through which the nehiyawak Ꮓ"Δᓇᐱ" renew their relationships in resurgent ways.

As Indigenous societies have strong oral traditions, even under conditions of persistent colonialism, Indigenous peoples find themselves actively and repeatedly reclaiming Indigenous stories, languages, and ways of thinking. These stories represent complex teachings, and speak to the tenuous process of rebuilding Cree economic relationships. Before moving to the antidotes found in Indigenous ontologies, I wish to turn to one of the main concepts used to problematize these relationships: the lens of economic exploitation.

Understanding Economic Exploitation

Colonial domination of Indigenous peoples in settler societies has an insidious impact on the social, political, cultural, legal, and economic lives of Indigenous peoples. Each of these spheres is part of a separate but inter-related system of colonial logics.³ If we only focus on state domination in settler societies, what I refer to as the first colonial logic, we miss an important part of the larger story – namely, how attempts to resist state domination may further entrench what I call the second colonial logic: economic exploitation. For example, current self-government initiatives are mingled with market forces to exploit Indigenous lands further. Similarly, the focus on capitalist exploitation of the land as a way for Indigenous peoples to gain increased financial independence from the state exemplifies the second type of colonial logic. This entrenchment, enacted over many years, slowly builds layers and layers of subjugation as Indigenous societies are, on the one hand, brought further into the logic guiding colonial policies and practices, while, on the other hand, simultaneously resisting that very logic.

Canadian economic progress has weighed heavily on Indigenous peoples,⁴ undermining their collective rights to economic security and self-determination. From the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries, the Canadian government's initiatives aimed at fostering Indigenous economic development failed repeatedly. They failed both in basic economic terms and in relation to the broad social indicators of the quality of individual and community life. On the whole, looking at costs and benefits, capitalism has come at a great cost to Indigenous peoples.

Capitalist exploitation has especially (negatively) affected Indigenous peoples in settler-colonial states like Canada. A study applying the United Nations Human Development Index explores this paradox (quantifying material standard of living, and a long and healthy life); although Canada ranked number one in 1999, statistics for First Nations people living on reserves show a ranking of seventy-ninth (Beavon and Cooke 2003, 201–9).⁵ Canada's socioeconomic “progress” has consistently been at the expense of Indigenous peoples, through a process of economic exploitation. I see capitalism in this land (Canada) predating and creating the environment for settler colonialism to take hold over Cree and other Indigenous peoples.⁶ This is evident through the fur-trade era. If capitalism is the investment of money in anticipation of a profit (Fulcher 2004, 2), the birth of capitalism here started with the fur trade, in which, as Innis's staples theory explains, staples (e.g., furs) were taken from Indigenous territories and the profits used to generate wealth in the metropolises of Britain, with Indigenous lands being the hinterland.⁷ With settler colonialism, the metropole or core became the Canadian state and, I argue, the hinterland continues to be Indigenous lands, where staples are exploited to increase the wealth of settler Canada. In the staples theory, the trajectory of the hinterland is the perpetual search for new staples (resources) to be exploited by the metropole. In Treaty Six territory the staples are no longer buffalo,⁸ beaver, and muskrat but, currently, non-renewable resources (for example, oil and gas). Indigenous peoples are interested in controlling their own economies in their own ways and in modes that also improve their societies – acts of self-determination.

Stated in another way: settler-colonial logic, related to the economy, has taken a two-pronged approach. The first prong is about control – governing control. You can see this through the *Indian Act*, which legislates First Nations people and communities “from cradle to grave” (Crane, Mainville, and Mason 2008, 79). What is often missed is the second prong

of colonial logic: colonialism has also centred on disrupting and destroying Indigenous economies – for example, exploitation during the fur trade (when the Hudson's Bay Company unjustly sold 2.9 million square miles of Indigenous lands) or through resource extraction (with oil and gas companies operating on Indigenous lands), and then creating and forcing upon us economic development programs linked to modernization (arguing that Indigenous cultures hinder economic development, and that once we assimilate into white society we will be able to develop economically) (Canada 1996, vol. 2, ch. 5).

There is an ironic aspect to this settler-colonial logic. It trades one master for another. For example, Canada negotiates a Comprehensive Land Claims agreement with a First Nation. This Indigenous nation in a northern part of the prairie region lived a mostly subsistence lifestyle of hunting, fishing, and harvesting for hundreds and hundreds of years, although resource extraction has increasingly infringed on this. The bipartite (with the federal government) or tripartite (with the province included) agreements are made with the uneven power relations of a Canadian government that determines the scope and boundaries of negotiations and seeks to provide certainty (legal and economic) to non-Indigenous interests. This allows, for example, a multinational corporation to start a new oil and gas project in an Indigenous community in Canada, and in exchange the corporation will hire a few community members to operate some of the equipment. Say this community's food security came mainly from living with the land – hunting, fishing, and harvesting. Then the corporation has to build a road, which increases external traffic. The oil and gas project and the new road disrupt and displace the moose, elk, muskrat, and so on that the community hunts for food. With leakages from tailings ponds and unfettered development, the fish in that First Nation's bodies of water now have tumours and are not fit for human consumption, and water from the river is poisoned and no longer potable. The First Nation can no longer be self-sufficient and feed itself. What are the options left for the community? Perhaps an Impact Benefit Agreement is negotiated, and a few members will have training in this new industry. Often, economic exploitation becomes a filter that limits economic choices and viable options for Indigenous communities – it constricts. In this example, self-government, which can often start from an outstanding land claims process, pushes Indigenous societies aggressively into the second colonial logic: economic exploitation through the exposure of Indigenous lands to faster resource development (see Jobin

2020). Gaining more independence from the Canadian government by negotiating self-government or by allowing economic development initiatives that open lands to multinational corporations places Indigenous people more aggressively under the governance of the global capitalist market (Castro-Rea and Altamirano-Jiménez 2008). This is a difficult option for Indigenous communities, because before the negotiations, economic development surrounding the Indigenous territory already had affected their ability to live a subsistence lifestyle.

Currently, economic exploitation can be examined through the lens of neoliberalism. Since the mid-1970s neoliberalism has gained international reach and can be considered a specific mode of capitalism. Three basic aspects of neoliberalism are free trade, the free mobility of capital, and a shift in the role of the state (Bargh 2007, 1). As an ideology, neoliberalism is the belief that sustained economic growth is the way to attain human progress (N. Smith 2007, 597) and that “human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills” (Harvey 2005, 2). Arguably, this has moved the market into all areas of social life (Leitner, Peck, and Sheppard 2006, 28), changing the notion of freedom to market freedom and the “commodification of everything” through privatization (Harvey 2005, 80). Regarding labour, “the figure of the ‘disposable worker’ emerges as prototypical upon the world stage” (169), where “neoliberalization has transformed the positionality of labour, of women, and of indigenous groups in the social order by emphasizing that labour is a commodity like any other” (171). Neoliberalism as a form of “governmentality” extends the logic of the market into other areas of society. I draw on the concept of governmentality, specifically related to how Plains Cree people have been negatively impacted by the state’s practices favouring the interests of the settler population.

Indigenous Political Economy

Connecting interdisciplinary theoretical approaches (in Indigenous studies and political science) is a new and undeveloped area of Indigenous political economy (IPE). Belanger (the first Canadian author I have seen use this term) sees it as beneficial for studying pre-contact North American Indigenous societies as it can “(1) help us discern how the forces of politics and economics influence community development, and (2) inform us how community-based ideologies related to consumption and leadership are structured to help maintain political and ecological balance while ensuring

the prosperity of community members” (Belanger 2010, 26). Belanger goes on to define Indigenous political economy as “the study of the environment’s influence on Indigenous political institutions and economic ideologies as these respond to prevailing ecological forces and the dynamics associated with Creation. Never forgetting the centrality of the interrelational network, it is imperative that we consider how the actions of individuals in a community influence its overall dynamic and how that one community in turn can affect its neighbours” (26). Belanger provides an important foundation from which to explore IPE, and although his focus on pre-contact Indigenous societies may appear limiting, there are other scholars who also study Indigenous societies and the economy in the present. An IPE approach can enable a multi-scale and broad analysis of Indigenous politics, society, and economy. Although authors do not necessarily define their approach as IPE, there is a fair bit of writing in this area, and in this section I explore works related to Indigenous economies, with a focus on Canada.

There are different ways to conceptualize the history of Indigenous economies in Canada. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) outlines four periods: the pre-contact period, the fur-trade period, the settler period, and the dependency period. In the Commission’s analysis, the pre-contact period is based on living in balance with nature, as opposed to accumulating wealth, and being tied to local means of subsistence that fluctuate seasonally (Canada 1996, 2:755–56). This period is also defined by widespread Indigenous nation-to-nation trade, facilitated by extensive existing Indigenous trade routes. The writers of RCAP argue that during the fur trade, Indigenous peoples were initially able to continue pre-existing economies and that patterns of trade and contact were region- and resource-dependent (2: chap. 5). This era encompasses the impacts of external markets with the volatile boom-and-bust cycle of staple production.

The settler period is marked by Indigenous peoples being “pushed increasingly to the margins” by settlers: newcomers “often simply assumed they had title to these lands and resources” (Canada 1996, 2:758). This is also the period of numbered-treaty making, although it is noted that in many cases Indigenous nations in given areas were missed or not invited to negotiate treaties. This era includes state enforcement of laws, imposition of Western government and governance structures, restrictions on mobility, under-resourcing of treaty obligations, and the beginning of Indigenous peoples participating in the market wage-labour economy, mostly in manual occupations (2: chap. 5). The last era, the dependence period, began

sometime between 1930 and 1960, and continues in some form to the present day. This period is defined by Indigenous dislocation and dispossession for the benefit of the settler economy. Resource companies were encouraged by settler governments to establish resource industries (e.g., oil and gas, mining, forestry), devastating territories where Indigenous peoples live and have historical jurisdiction, and where they are trying to continue subsistence-based practices (Canada 1996). RCAP also documents federal and provincial regulations that have harmed Indigenous economies during this period.

The First Nations Development Institute (FNDI) (2004) explores the history of Indigenous economies in North America related to asset eras, in which assets are described broadly as holistic in nature and include financial, physical, natural, institutional, legal, cultural, and political assets as well as human and social capital. In this analysis, the six historical asset periods are stewardship, exchange, theft, extraction, mismanagement, and restriction, with the current era moving toward asset control (FNDI 2009, 52). Asset stewardship, FNDI explains, was a period in which Indigenous societies had control over their assets, with economies based on Indigenous epistemologies in which stewardship “allowed for highly sophisticated and complex economies of asset use and accumulation to occur” (52). Treaty making and negative impacts on Indigenous lands mark the exchange era, in which these lands were no longer under exclusive Indigenous control. The asset theft era focused on the settler state’s failure to fulfil the obligations undertaken during the treaty era, and included broad occurrences of theft of land and resources, facilitated by state policies. During the era of asset extraction, natural resources on Indigenous lands were increasingly extracted without significant benefit to Indigenous communities, leaving behind “immeasurable expenses related to environmental pollution, loss of land use and destroyed ecosystems” (52). Asset mismanagement overlaps with the previous era and is described as a time of paternalistic policies giving settler states control, with corresponding mismanagement of the trust funds, leases, and financial assets of Indigenous communities. FNDI argues that these three eras (theft, extraction, and mismanagement) have left Indigenous societies impoverished and in a position of dependency on the state (52). Asset restriction is described as the settler state’s usurpation of control over Indigenous assets. FNDI’s view is that Indigenous societies need to create asset strategies to move toward asset control, and that this is needed for self-determination (10).

In terms of economic relationships, when did settler colonialism take hold for the Plains Cree? One argument is that this occurred during the fur trade. Historical geographer Frank Tough (2005, 32) explains how commercialization that began during the fur trade provides a lens into Indigenous economic history, in which “aspects of daily life increasingly fall under the influence of exchange value. More and more, needs or wants become satisfied by market-related activities.” Furthermore, the privileging of market tendencies is an old colonial logic with “long-standing unequal integration with mercantilism” (31). Mercantilism was an economic system popular in Europe from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, and was based on the belief that a nation’s wealth and power were best improved by increasing exports. It is significant that this included government regulation of the economy, such that “colonial possessions should serve as markets for exports and as suppliers of raw materials to the mother country. Manufacturing was forbidden in colonies, and all commerce between colony and mother country was held to be a monopoly of the mother country” (Encyclopedia Britannica n.d.-b). Tough (2005, 31) sees the commercial capitalist market as being the first and most enduring institution affecting Indigenous peoples in Canada.

In contrast, historian and poet Walter Hildebrandt (2008, 6) argues that Native societies changed less during the fur-trade era than did European traders, who had to adapt to Native trade practices. For John H. Moore (1993), the main change for Indigenous people was based on an economic conflict that occurred between capitalism and “communal modes of production” (15).⁹ Frank Tough (2005, 54), however, argues that on a macro-economic scale, Indigenous trappers and middlemen did not have real equity and were not partners within the fur-trade system, in which real decision-making power was under European control. Tough also critiques other scholars’ denial that economic exploitation preceded political oppression (54). This economic exploitation continued with the reserve system. Sociologist Menno Boldt (1993, 231) argues that the “reserve system was created to clear Indians out of the way of Canadian economic development,” removing Indigenous peoples from their full territories to enable capitalist pursuits.

Currently, many scholars advocate for neoliberal conceptions of capital accumulation and corresponding institutions of governance for Indigenous peoples. The main difference among them is how these authors conceive of the “problem” related to “undeveloped” Aboriginal economies. Political scientist Tom Flanagan argues that Native peoples’ “problem” rests in a lack

of private property and believes that “as quickly as possible, Indian bands should receive full ownership of their reserves, with the right to subdivide, mortgage, sell, and otherwise dispose of their assets, including buildings, lands, and all natural resources” (Flanagan 2013, 50). Similarly, economist Hernando De Soto articulates the need for private property systems in which private property rights are enforced. From this perspective, land can be used as collateral for economic enterprise (De Soto 2000; Woodruff 2001). Opening up land¹⁰ for marketization is in the interests of both the Canadian state and the private sector, but often operates to the detriment of Indigenous peoples (Castro-Rea and Altamirano-Jiménez 2008, 246).

In neoliberalism, citizens are compelled to be self-sufficient and not a burden on the state (Slowey 2008, xv). Calvin Helin, an author from the Tsimshian Nation, argues that dependency is the issue for Indigenous peoples, and that economic development is the solution. He contends that financial dependency, combined with a growing Indigenous population could completely overwhelm Canada’s financial capabilities (Helin 2006, 59). To counteract this perceived threat, Helin proposes a development model focused on resource extraction that leverages Indigenous land, cash, and labour (177–90). He suggests Indigenous communities impose “development leverage over traditional territories” by creating procurement agreements (188–90), for example, where companies operating in an Indigenous territory have quotas for how much of their supply chain needs are met by Indigenous businesses. Similarly, in the second volume of the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People*, recommendation 2.5.10 states that resource-development corporations operating on Indigenous territories should provide training, employment, and economic “rents” (Canada 1996, 2:857), with a strong correlation between self-government, control over lands, and improved Indigenous economic development.

Self-government and improved self-governance have been strongly correlated to Indigenous economic development. Bureaucratic control has also been seen as the main issue facing Indigenous peoples. Political scientist Gabrielle Slowey (2008, xiv–xv) writes that capitalism is a tool with which First Nations can achieve self-determination through the mimicking of neoliberal principles constituting the “ideal citizen.” She elucidates that self-determination is the neoliberal ideal, as “self-determination re-establishes the proper balance between First Nations and the marketplace that was perverted by the welfare state, giving rise to an unhealthy dependency on the state” (17). Business scholar Robert Anderson sees a positive relationship

among control of resources, business development, economic development, self-reliance, self-determination, and self-government. In his “First Nations Development Circle” model, improvement in one area is believed to have a positive effect on all other areas (R.B. Anderson 1998, 14). Ineffective and undeveloped governing infrastructures have been correlated to undeveloped Indigenous economies.

The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development has largely succeeded in promoting its model of development to Indigenous peoples in Canada and the United States, as well as influencing policymakers at the state/provincial and national levels. Through a national American study, researchers Stephen Cornell and Joseph Kalt (2006, 11) position successful economic development as having everything to do with nation building – focusing on Indigenous nation sovereignty (self-rule), governing institutions, cultural match to these institutions, strategic orientation, and leadership focused on nation building. These authors have done a phenomenal job in making their findings known to Indigenous communities in North America, and many communities and state governments have seen widespread resonance with their findings. Some authors criticize the Harvard Project for not accounting for the complexity of issues in its approach. Specifically, Dowling (2005, 125) writes that the “myopic view of the world” that the Harvard Project suggests “a society must take in order that these conditions take hold (acceptance of the use of natural resources for economic gain, the resulting environmental degradation and stratification of society, to name a few) is not congruent with their [Indigenous] cultures,” and further stating that although very successful, the Harvard Project has failed to thoroughly examine or reveal the negative implications and limitations of its approach.

One strain of the Indigenous economic development literature speaks to specific aspects of neoliberal ideology that suggest changes to make the neoliberal paradigm better fit Indigenous communities. Indigenous studies scholar David Newhouse (2004, 38) challenges the tendency to denigrate and displace Indigenous knowledge within the economic development discourse. His answer is to create “people-centred” development theories that enable “an economy that affirms Aboriginal cultural identities and the autonomy of Aboriginal cultures and that sanctions and supports Aboriginal social structures and values” (40). Cree scholar Wanda A. Wuttunee (2004, 12–14) similarly sees a need for a shift in approaches to economic development for Indigenous peoples that would acknowledge spiritual and material

relationships to the land. In this approach, neoliberal ideologies are not completely rejected, but they are altered so that the idea of “maximum” short-term profit is replaced with the notion of a reasonable profit that seeks to honour the limits of the planet’s resources (7).

Critical Indigenous Political Economy

Discourses promoting Indigenous peoples’ success in capital markets have not exhaustively examined the consequences of the hegemonic and individualizing powers of capitalism, but scholars have particularly critiqued the application of neoliberal instruments of capitalism and governance to Indigenous communities (Altamirano-Jiménez 2004; Bargh 2007; Corntassel 2012). In this section I explore the literature that is developing within a theoretical approach I term critical Indigenous political economy (CIPE).¹¹

Dene scholar and activist Glen Coulthard draws from political theorists and frames a critical Indigenous political economy approach. Most recognizably using the work of Karl Marx, Coulthard (2014a, 58) maintains that the process of primitive accumulation expropriates the means of production from non-capitalist societies, signalling a defining moment in capitalist extension, the preparation of the sociopolitical and material conditions for the “birth of capitalism” in a territory. Coulthard sees primitive accumulation as not only a moment, but also that which provides an understanding of the ongoing dynamics shaping relations between Indigenous peoples and Canada (56). For Coulthard, Marx’s analysis can be better applied to Indigenous peoples in settler colonialism by (1) framing the analysis with a prioritization of colonial domination (59–60); (2) understanding how Indigenous labour in a settler-colonial context becomes increasingly superfluous (61); and (3) understanding “how colonial relations are not primarily exerted through ‘brute force’ or ‘servitude,’ but through the asymmetrical exchange of mediated forms of state recognition and accommodation” (62). In this process, Indigenous peoples are increasingly disconnected from land and from their own forms of governance and drawn into capitalist market conditions, and the modes of social organization are reorganized (Coulthard 2014a; Coulthard 2014b).

Māori scholar Maria Bargh (2007, 2) and Sámi scholar Rauna Kuokkanen (2006; 2008) have positioned neoliberalism as the new form of colonization affecting Indigenous peoples. Using New Zealand as a case study, social scientist Wendy Larner (2000, 18) states that the Māori struggle to self-administer their social services in culturally appropriate ways has

neoliberals and some Māori finding “themselves in unexpected agreement on a key theme: namely, the dangers of continued dependency on the state.” Therefore, this path can be seen as “part of the discursive construction and reconstruction associated with welfare state restructuring” (18). This is the exact predicament many Indigenous peoples in Canada face. The Indigenous goal of self-government has constructed the movement along a neoliberal trajectory, directly affecting collective ideologies and Indigenous relationships with human and nonhuman beings. Along this economic-development path, Indigenous peoples can achieve self-government to lessen state control and simply exchange it for hegemonic forms of market control. Zapotec political scientist Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez (2013, 75) sees Indigenous land dispossession occurring under the “liberalization of nature,” and then a “double dispossession” occurring with neoliberalism, “through the recognition of a reified version of indigeneity and through a bundle of rights based on the alienation of Indigenous peoples’ relations and responsibilities to place.” She explains that this “rescripting of indigeneity is embedded in notions of entrepreneurialism, the self, and the economy” (75). Neoliberalism as colonization charts a connection between colonial and neoliberal practices (Bargh 2007, 1).

Indigenous peoples striving for meaningful self-determination are being pushed into a version of citizenship based on the values of the market. Altamirano-Jiménez (2004, 349) argues that neoliberal governmental practices regarding Indigenous demands serve to disconnect self-government from Indigenous territory. The marketization of Indigenous citizenship is tantamount to “the fulfilment of Indigenous demands through market integration and the rhetoric of cultural recognition” (350). In a neoliberal framework, then, Indigenous rights and citizenship are commodified in a way that is profitable for the Canadian state. I draw from Altamirano-Jiménez’s connections between place-based understandings of Indigenous peoples and the specific impacts of neoliberalism.

Providing an analysis of settler colonialism in the United States, Kul Wicasa scholar Nick Estes (2019, 123) reminds readers how Indigenous resistance has been and continues to be about fighting against settler colonialism and fighting for Indigenous life and just relationships with humans and nonhumans, including the land. His work also demonstrates the transformative power that occurs during resistance (Estes 2017, 119), even in situations of extreme power imbalance. Political theorist Robert Nichols (2020) unpacks the process and structural conditions of dispossession in

Anglo settler colonial contexts through two processes: transforming an Indigenous worldview of land relations into proprietary terms, and systematically transferring the title of this property (into settler hands); he writes, “dispossession merges commodification … and theft into one moment” (8). Through making property, Nichols writes, an abstraction occurs, one that anchors a certain type of settler “relations, rights, and ultimately, power” (31). In this way, Anglo settler colonialism always includes a transformation in how humans relate to land (34). This is a genesis moment of economic exploitation for Indigenous peoples. Tsimshian and Nuu-chah-nulth scholar Clifford Atleo (2015, 49) asks if capitalism can be Indigenized; his analysis shows “not without radical changes to either capitalism or Indigenous worldviews that might render either unrecognizable.” In *Land Back*, critical theorist Shiri Pasternak and Anishinaabe scholar Hayden King (2019, 48) provide meticulous examples of the techniques of dispossession that have occurred in Canada against Indigenous peoples as well as different forms of Indigenous-led strategies of reclamation to “restoring Indigenous land and life.” Their grounded analysis shows gaps in federal and provincial policies, the resulting implications to Indigenous peoples, as well as potential for transformation in these structural relations of dispossession.

Critical Indigenous political economy (CIPE) can facilitate a multi-scale analysis in which a research question can be explored in a broad context – settler colonialism, impacts of unfettered capitalism through a nation-state and an international lens, etc. – while also situating analysis, as one example, in Plains Cree specificity. CIPE provides an approach through which to examine not only the ways in which Indigenous peoples have been affected by all of these settler-colonial processes, but also Indigenous peoples’ challenges to these forces that try to reconstitute them or attempt to make them disappear legally, socially, or politically.

Being Indigenous is a form of resistance in and of itself, but putting into practice a certain set of normative customs, grounded in an Indigenous-specific peoplehood, adds another layer to this resistance. For my work, I focus on the specific ways in which Plains Cree people are in relationship with the land;¹² the specific ways economic development affects the relationships of Cree people with each other, the land, and other human and non-human beings; Cree practices of resistance against economic exploitation; and acts of resurgence. New literary works are beginning to theorize alternatives for Indigenous peoples. In contrast to neoliberal approaches, and outside the confines of capitalism, Kuokkanen (2007) explores the gift paradigm

in Indigenous societies. In this view, the gift illustrates more than just an economic function; it is applicable to “all my relations” (23). In many Indigenous world views, “giving entails an active relationship between the human and natural worlds, one characterized by reciprocity, a sense of collective responsibility, and reverence toward the gifts of the land” (23). Kuokkanen (2011, 232) also writes about the need to reorient Indigenous self-governance around the notion of social economy, which “recognizes the ways in which in indigenous economic systems, economy is embedded in social relations.” Although this new discourse is dynamic, there is still space to include further analysis from diverse perspectives by inviting more voices and Indigenous knowledges connected to place. Further research is needed into Indigenous economic relations that uphold the complexities and beauty embedded in Indigenous knowledges.

For the purpose of my work, I am interested in understanding economy in a broad sense, not one confined to the dominant capitalist economic system. I agree that there is “the tendency to constitute ‘the economy’ as a singular capitalist system or space rather than as a zone of cohabitation and contestation among multiple economic forms” (Gibson-Graham 2006). There are authors, such as Vandana Shiva, who see three economies at work: the dominant capitalist economy; nature’s economy, based on “the production of goods and services by nature” (Shiva 2005, 16); and the sustenance economy, which “includes all spheres in which humans produce in balance with nature and reproduce society through partnerships, mutuality, and reciprocity” (16). Seeing economic relations through *nehiyâwiwin* Ꮣ"Δ᳚Δ᳚᳚ (“Creeness”) broadens the discussion on the economy to include nature’s economy and the sustenance economy based on relations to human and nonhuman beings.

CONTENT WARNING:
THE FOLLOWING CONTAINS A DESCRIPTION OF A SHOOTING.

Returning to young Colten Boushie. In the Gerald Stanley trial, the defence used the argument of Indigenous bodies intruding on settler private property. Cree scholars Gina Starblanket and Dallas Hunt (2020, 87) invert this logic and demonstrate that this is actually a continued structure of settler intrusion on Indigenous lands and how this settler violence is in contrast to the ongoing acts of generosity to share the land through treaty. Returning to my grandpa’s telling of a time when settlers relied on Indigenous peoples,

how “many [immigrants] didn’t know anything about doing these things for themselves, nor did they have the material to work with. They went to the Indian for help and to be shown how to do these things for themselves.” Grandpa also said, “The people were very friendly and hospitable. A traveller was made welcome day or night, if they happened to be travelling and needed shelter, food for the night.”

Driving home after swimming one afternoon, a group of young Indigenous friends and family had a flat tire and drove onto a settler’s farm. After a series of unfortunate events, Gerald Stanley made the unreasonable decision to fire his gun; his gun went off while pointed at the back of Colten Boushie’s head. Young Colten died, and Gerald Stanley walked away.

Gina Starblanket and Dallas Hunt (2020, 51) explain that settler colonialism operates through a logic of elimination where the “driving motivation is land” – land that is seen through a settler lens as private property. In this example, the logic of protecting private property is a valuing of private property over life. Colten Boushie had relations, human and other living beings. While the Stanley family sat in their house and drank coffee while Colten’s body lay in the dirt on their driveway,¹³ I believe the askiy ᄔᓈᐯ+ was providing healing and helping him in his transition to the next world. The beauty of natural law is that it happens whether we acknowledge it or not. We are in relations to all other living beings, whether we acknowledge it or not.

I see the transformative potential embedded in Indigenous world view, Indigenous bodies, and relationality with human beings, the landscape, and waterscape to shape-shift Canadian colonialism and Canadian institutions. Inferring from my grandpa’s words, that Canadian society would come to Indigenous knowledge holders collectively, in humbleness, to seek ways to live in miyo-pimâtsiwin ቤት ለለጥቃድ, the good life. That Indigenous peoples would one day be free or unshackled from the ongoing acts of settler colonial violence and would continue to live in self-determining ways, demonstrating acts of renewal in wâhkôhtôwin አብዛኛል and miyo-wicihitowin ቤት ውጤናል (good relations) with Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, animals, and other beings.

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