

**Reclaiming Territories Through Indigenous Performance**

by

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## **Abstract**

This thesis project illustrates how Indigenous-centered performance enables and supports collective meaning-making and indigenous continuity. An examination of the Canadian policies regarding indigenous ceremony, public performances, and community gathering is presented to show the effects this complexity history is felt by indigenous people today. The use of counter-narrative, and telling ancestral stories of resistance provide insight into the way in which indigenous people have resisted these assimilation policies over generations. Our program here is to animate indigenous people within a living framework of continuity and Indigenous Knowledge Systems by focusing on how today's performance and performing is connected to oral cultures, indigenous intellectual traditions. Indigenous performance and indigenous artists who while giving an insight into how indigenous people are creating safe social and learning spaces and can invoke positive spectrum emotions to combat colonial trauma. Interviewing five indigenous artistic performers, who engage many genres in performance, sets the basis of indigenous research methods including Kovach's conversational method of interviewing. Presenting indigenous performances' role in indigenous continuity, education, and generational knowledge transmission affirm the deep consideration of indigenous artists today and their role in leadership and in empowering indigenous people and communities. This research also uncovers a generational knowledge system that values of education, healing, protection and reciprocity that compose legacies of ancestral knowledge that can propagate healthy and loving indigenous realities.

## **Lay Summary**

I asked five Indigenous artists about their work in relationship to indigenous ancestors and indigenous communities in which they perform. I asked them because they have worked very hard for many years to “lift up” indigenous people, I wanted to know about the legacies they want to leave for the next generation so that indigenous people can continue to overcome the laws set against them throughout Canadian. Through uncovering history, stories and deeply felt relationships, I aimed to find out what is needed for healthy indigenous people and futures.

## **Preface**

This thesis is an original, unpublished work in collaboration with five Indigenous artists and myself. Utilizing indigenous research methods, including Kovach's conversational method of interviewing, I added to this method by including the thoughts and reflections not covered in my interview questions. In the winter of 2016, I interviewed five indigenous artists using video as the medium for collecting the data; an AV team out the Department of Theatre and Film at UBC joined me the filming. Lindsay Monture and Mique'l Dangeli assisted in the spelling and interpretation of the indigenous words within the text. The research design was meant to gain an understanding of the imperatives that emerges within an indigenous knowledge framework by observing reoccurring themes, sayings, and teachings found within indigenous artist reflections on their artistic work and engagement in performance. The research design, data collection, and analysis were carryout by myself. The interviewing woven throughout the project are covered by the University of British Columbia's Behavioral Research Ethic Board [certificate H15-02935].

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## **List of Abbreviations**

DTES - Down Town East Side

FHFN - Four Host First Nations

IK - Indigenous Knowledge

IKS - Indigenous Knowledge Systems

PTSD - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

## **Glossary**

### Kanyen'keha Words

Kanyen'keha – Mohawk language

Rotinonhsyón:ni - people of the longhouse, or longhouse people

Shonkwaya'tíson – the Creator

Kanyen'kehá:ka – People of the Flint (Mohawk People)

Yethinihsténha onhwentsya – Our Mother the Earth

### Sm'algyax Words

Sm'algyax - indigenous language spoken by the Nisga'a, Tsimshian, and Gitksan Nations

Gitnotk – a title carried in Tsimshain cultural society

Halaayt – a title carried in Tsimshian cultural society

NOX NOX - masks/dance masks, also meaning power, or supernatural power

Wii Aamligi Laxha - the Creator

### Nishnaabe Words

mino bimaadizwain - the good life

Gzhwe Mindoo – the Creator

*e-yaa'oyaanh* – I am, the way I am living, or becoming, my identity

### Cree Words

Kookum – grandmother

## Acknowledgements

I give many layers of gratitude to Shonkwaya'tison, the Creator for the many lessons and challenges I faced, and for the strength to overcome them. I give many layers of gratitude to my mother, Alberta Monture for life and for being the greatest example of a Rotinonhsyón:ni woman I could ask for. Thank you mom for confirming and nurturing all aspects of my being. Thank you for always knowing what to say to console what harms me, when I'm struggling to be kind and loving. I want to thank my family and for the unconditional love and support I utilize everyday. It is that love that connects us however far away we are. I give great thanks to the Coast Salish nations and territories in which I find a home to learn, work, and raise my children. I would like to thank the artist who contributed many conversations to this project and who dedicate their craft towards indigenous people's empowerment. They are: Madelaine McCallum, Mique'l Dangeli, Mike Dangeli, Leela Gilday, and Ronnie Dean Harris. I want to thank my committee members, Tom Scholte and Dana Claxton for guiding me in a healthy and generative way with encouragement and conversation. I would like to thank the great number of people who have supported by work and believed in me. They are: Margo Kane, Lindsay Monture, Larry Nicholson, Lacie Burning, Micholos Touchie, Dancing Water, Dr. Amanda Wager, Dr. Marissa Munoz, Kirsty Allen, Dr. Michelle LaFlamme, Pemba Jade Doyle, Kaayla Whachell, Evan Enid Ho, Dr. Hillel Goelman, John Robinson, Treffery Deerfoot, Dr. Steven Taubeneck, Dr. Jo-ann Archibald, Dr. Ramona BigHead, Donna Gardner, Dr. Leonie Pihama, Dr. Dara Kelly, Dr. Dorothy Christian, Dr. Alannah Young-Leon, Ivan Wilbur, Art Leon, Dr. Jennifer Chan, Dr. Lisa Loutzenheiser, Jennifer Moss, Trula Fountain, Melanie Burning, Frank Burning, Sadie Burning, Ben Button and Rayne Burning.

## Dedication

I dedicate this work to the many ancestors who were challenged by Canadian legislation throughout Canadian history. I dedicate this work to the indigenous artists, educators and culturalists who are now in the *spirit world*. Each had dedicated their lives and work to remain indigenous people of the land. I reciprocate that dedication and honour that hard work. I dedicate this work to those struggling to revitalize their indigenous identity in a good way and to the many Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women lost and slain in this country. Finally, I dedicate this work to the faces yet to come and welcome their narratives into this world.

## Chapter 1: Traveling in an Arc Across the Sky

### Introduction.

*A Story: I was visiting my home community, Six Nations of the Grand River Indian Reservation in Southern Ontario, on the weekend of The Six Nation's "Champion of Champions" Pow Wow. My mother, sisters, our kids and I, came back to the Pow Wow during supper break. Six Nations women singers were in the arbor singing women's songs for our guests and visiting friends on the Pow Wow trail. As we walked down the hill after entering the main gates, I heard Sadie Buck's voice from way far away. I sit now and imagine it travelling in an arc across the sky. In that instant, their singing hit me right in the stomach as if I was standing right in front of them receiving it. It made the hairs on my arms and back of my neck stand right up. The singing opened a part of me that can only be described as ancestral. This sensation was coupled with the realization that a person's deeply rooted intentions can be projected from the stomach, heart, and body through sound and voice. It's a power within. My spirit felt a manifestation to do this very thing, immediately. My spirit's volition strongly gravitated towards this singing practice, towards this tradition. Their voices activated a seed that had already existed within my being. It was a gift, from my ancestors from one to another, that traveled to me over tens of thousands of years. I began singing and practicing our songs. I remember that feeling of activation and profound awakening, and try to consciously project this power from all of my being when I sing. Now, when I sing, I think about the gift I was shown that day at the Pow Wow and how I seek to share and activate the gifts and seeds in others.*

### 1.1 Who I Am

They call me Francine Burning. I belong to the Kanyen'kehá:ka, People of the Flint, known today as the Mohawk Nation. I am a Turtle Clan woman. The community my family comes from is the Six Nations of the Grand River Indian Reservation located in southern Ontario, Canada. My people originated from the Mohawk valley and Mohawk River situated in the Adirondack Mountains in what is known as York State, USA. I come from a big family, six sisters and four brothers, and have been raising my three female born children as a lone parent for over 16 years. Each summer I return home with them to attend ceremonies and events. I have

been performing and singing since I was young. The stories and territories of my people, the Rotinonhsyón:ni,<sup>1</sup> better known as Iroquois people of the Great Lakes area form a part of my life. I am grounded through my upbringing within Rotinonhsyón:ni ethics and values, and over the years have sought to revitalize knowledge found within our communities, ceremonies and literature to synthesize the values and ethics with the foundations of Rotinonhsyón:ni intellect and ways of being. Early family and cultural influences gave me the tools to engage in an understanding of what is needed to provide the continuation of my indigeneity.

I have lived on the West Coast in Vancouver, British Columbia as an uninvited outsider to the Coast Salish people (Musqueam, Lil'wat, Squamish and Tsleil-Wahtuth nations) and territories for the second half of my life. Being away from home, meant I had to find more family on the West Coast. Vancouver is a major metropolitan area where natives from many nations reside and the Coast Salish people are very loving and welcoming. Living in Vancouver for half my life, I have been exposed to Elders and teachings from many nations and territories. I have been influenced by west coast culture, practices and land. In my view, indigenous people need family, Elders, and territory and accountability to these to in order to support an economy of ethics and values from which they emerge.

In my culture we live by the “Good Life”<sup>2</sup> teachings brought by *Sky Woman*, a divine being from *Sky World*, and common ancestor in our Creation Story. In *Dancing on Our Turtle's*

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<sup>1</sup> Rotinonhsyón:ni means people of the longhouse, or longhouse people. This is a term we use for Iroquois people originally governed under the Great Law of Peace. This would include all Six Nations (Tuscarora, Oneida, Seneca, Onondaga, Mohawk and Cayuga) under the Iroquois Confederacy. We call each other that because our confederacy is considered one big longhouse.

<sup>2</sup> Within my people's creation story, Sky Woman came from Sky World and brought the teachings of the “Good Life” that is a reality of sky world people's existence where no one suffers (from war, or ill health), and “everyone gets to eat” (Doxtator, 2005, p. 159).

*Back; Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence*, Anishinaabe writer, folk singer, and academic Leanne Simpson echoes and adds: “We need our Elders, our languages, and our lands, along with vision, intent, commitment, community and ultimately action. We must move ourselves beyond resistance and survival, to flourishing and *mino bimaadiziwin* (living the good life, or the art of living the good life)”(Simpson, 2011, p. 17). We also need safe spaces. Safe spaces are vital to reprograming the effects of the many violences and degradations that are specific to a people who will not be absorbed into the mainstream body politic.

## **1.2 Purpose**

This project illustrates how Indigenous-centered performance enables and supports collective meaning-making and indigenous continuity. Indigenous performers today are contributing to an empowered indigenous reality. Community engagement, empowerment, and indigenous performance are intrinsically connected. Through conversations with artists about their current work, we can observe the virtues, imperatives,<sup>3</sup> and aspirations that continue through indigenous performers. Their artistic performance and expression points to what remains vital for indigenous prosperity. By presenting indigenous performers’ work and their views about their artistic practice, we see an emergence of a self-determined space, specifically for and among indigenous people.

The teachings, concepts, stories, songs, and knowledge of indigenous nations from across Canada promote healthy futures and the continuation of indigenous ways of being. Utilizing the many voices, knowledges and intellect of indigenous elders, activists, mentors, ceremonialists,

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<sup>3</sup> In this context, imperatives mean essential aspects to indigenous survival and continuation.

scholars, and performers carries an understanding of the inter-tribal reality of many indigenous people today. This inter-tribal inquiry relates indigenous collective struggles and victories to the many generations of indigenous people across Canada who share a mission to remain indigenous. It connects the power and energy of many individuals and communities to combat erasure and assimilation. Focusing on performance today ties indigenous people to our oral cultures, traditions, and history while giving an insight into how indigenous people have survived through the illness of violent and forced colonization.

### **1.2.1 Reflection**

Being on the West Coast away from my family and community has been difficult. Being around other native people has made me feel at home. This comforting space gravitated me towards event-based indigenous performance; a space that gave me the medicine<sup>4</sup> I needed to continue on in my day-to-day. It is not for me to say that I am the creator of this knowledge. The knowledge and the knowledge systems are already there. I act in this work more as a curator of knowledge, coupled with my own experiences and mission to continue as an indigenous person of the Mohawk Nation, a person seeking “Good Life” on my own terms. Restoring indigenous nations and nations of people back to health will take safety, nourishment, and healing. As a consumer of indigenous performance, my intent is to shed light on places/spaces that I found healing and protection so that other indigenous people might come to know the transformative and beautiful things happening in our communities.

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<sup>4</sup> Medicine in indigenous terms is considered anything that could enable healing or a balance healthy state. With healing referring to the process of going from unwell to well, while medicine is a means to providing aid in the process. In this context, medicine could mean many things, acts, herbs, songs, and ceremonies. A simple example could be a hug when a person is in despair.



### **1.3 Research with Indigenous People and Communities**

In any meaningful research with indigenous people and communities, the most important aspect must be the relevancy of the research to indigenous people and its' ability to assist them in continuing as peoples who understand and live indigenous ways of being. Indigenous research should only be for the betterment of the people and community the research engages. As an indigenous researcher working with indigenous artists, my goal is to use an indigenous social movement approach to research in an effort to uncover the intricacies of indigenous performance today and the intentions of members among the indigenous performance community. Maori scholar Linda Smith writes,

The research agenda is conceptualized here as constituting a programme and set of approaches that are situated within the decolonization politics of the indigenous peoples' movement. The agenda is focused strategically on the goal of self-determination of indigenous peoples. Self-determination in a research agenda becomes something more than a political goal. It becomes a goal of social justice which is expressed through and across a wide range of psychological, social, cultural and economic terrains. It necessarily involves the process of transformation, of decolonization, of healing and of mobilization as peoples. The processes, approaches and methodologies – while dynamic and open to different influences and possibilities – are critical elements of a strategic research agenda (Smith, 2012, p. 120).

I use a set of approaches that include counter-narrative, poetry, Storywork, rejection and refusal, as well as healing affirmations to reclaim and acquire self-determined and healthy psychological, social, and cultural spaces for this project and for indigenous people. The mobilization of indigenous knowledge today through performance and the indigenous performance community requires a multi-faceted approach because of the history of colonization in the suppression of indigenous knowledge and performance. Additionally, Indigenous performance' effects are felt and expressed "across a wide range of psychological, social, cultural, and economic terrains."

In order to better understand the motivating factors of indigenous performers and the current functions of performance for indigenous people, I began conversations with five indigenous performers who self-identify as Indigenous, Métis, Aboriginal, First Nations, Native Canadian, Native American, or by their nation, and whom had been performing for more than 10 years. Each respectively identified with specific communities or nations of origin. I included indigenous performers whose work specifically engages indigenous content or practice, as well who have performed in indigenous communities all over North America and in some cases overseas. I invited these performers and culturists to these conversations because they have demonstrated over many years that their work is intended to empower indigenous people and communities by physically doing the work and continually expanding and bettering their craft in performance. A wide range of performance genre is represented in this group of artists because indigenous people today are utilizing virtually every form of western and indigenous performance genre.

### **1.3.1 The Artistes Who Contributed to this Project**

Madelaine McCallum's traditional name is Strong Earth Women. Originally from Ile-a-la-Crosse, Saskatchewan, her mom is Camellia Roy, and father is Thomas McCallum, also known as White Standing Buffalo. Madelaine is a Cree/Métis educator and mufti-genre dance expert. Madeline comes from a long-standing tradition of Metis jigging. Her dance practice includes Hip Hop, Pow Wow and Zumba and has also entered beauty pageants.

"Mike Dangeli is of the Nisga'a, Tlingit, Tsetsaut, and Tsimshian Nations. He grew up in his people's traditional territory in Southeast Alaska and Northern British Columbia. Mike is a renowned artist and carver. His work is collected and exhibited throughout North America and

Europe. He is a singer, songwriter, and dancer. In partnership with his wife Mique'l Dangeli, Mike leads the Git Hayetsk Dancers – an internationally renowned First Nations dance group based in Vancouver, BC. He has carved over 50 of the masks performed by their group.<sup>5</sup>” (The Git Hayestk Dancers, n.d.).

“Dr. Mique'l Dangeli was born and raised on the only Indian Reserve in the state of Alaska. She is of the Tsimshian Nation of Metlakatla Indian Community.” Mique'l holds a PhD in Art History, Visual Art and Theory at The University of British Columbia. “She specializes in Northwest Coast First Nations Art History. Mique'l served her community for eight years as their Museum Director. She is a curator, author, dancer, choreographer, and co-leader of the Git Hayetsk Dancers. She has choreographed a large body of dances for newly composed songs among her nation as well as created new dances for ancient songs whose dance has been lost during their cultural oppression” (The Git Hayestk Dancers, n.d.).

Leela Gilday is a Juno award winning folk signer and songwriter from the Sahtu Dene nation. Leela was raised in the North on both Tlicho and Yellowknives Dene territory. Leela comes from a long line of musicians and was raised as a singer who is currently based in Yellowknife, NT. Her full-length recordings have also claimed awards such as Western Canadian Music Awards and Aboriginal Female Entertainer of the Year to name a few.

Ronnie Dean Harris' family comes from Yale, Tsawwassen, Skookumchuck, Mount Currey, and Coquitlam. Ronnie is a practicing media artist, Hip Hop artist, and graphic designer.

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<sup>5</sup>Mike's biography and more about the Git Hayetsk can be found on The Git Hayetsk website at <http://www.githayetsk.com/>

Ronnie has also engaged theatre acting and is also a long time mentor and educator for indigenous youth as well as a self-directed researcher.

Their performance-based work forwards Indigenous wisdom and content including stories, testimonies, sayings, and songs. Their contribution to this project brings us to an understanding of the power and energy of individuals and community to resist practices of erasure and assimilation that have been experienced generationally by all indigenous nations across this continent. Their art and performance practice is the continuation of Indigenous intellectual traditions that enables indigenous people a means to a new emergence.

#### **1.4 Towards an Indigenous Methodology**

Our program here is to animate indigenous people within a living framework of continuity and to contextualize a shared history of struggle against colonial trauma; to show how indigenous people are still connected to each other, and our territories through performance and witnessing. This aim includes indigenous decolonial scholarship and thought so that the insidious effects of colonization and colonial thought can be identified and neutralized. Anti-colonial actions and stories also provide a setup for indigenous resurgence, cultural revitalization and a new emergence. In this context, the research frame used is one that supports indigenous continuity, self-determination, and well being. This approach aligns with my intention to do research in a good way.

##### **1.4.1 Conversational Method of Interviewing**

Margret Kovach's conversational method of interviewing guided me through this work in a way that was natural and fluid for the context and worldview in which it is couched. Kovach explains, "The conversational method is of significance to Indigenous methodologies because it

is a method of gathering knowledge based on oral story-telling tradition congruent with an Indigenous paradigm.” (Kovach, 2010, p. 40). Having had long-term relationships with the artists and exposure to their art, I found that the conversational method is a well-suited indigenous method. In Kovach’s terms, “having a pre-existing and ongoing relationship with participants is an accepted characteristic of research according to a tribal paradigm”(Kovach, 2009, p. 51). Throughout my interviews, I share my ways of thinking around performance today and its function in continuing Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) because, “cultural longevity depends on the ability to sustain cultural knowledges. At the heart of a cultural renaissance, indigenous or otherwise, is a restoration and respectful *use* of that culture’s knowledge systems”(Kovach, 2009, p. 12). Within these interviews, I shared my own observations of how “the people” benefitted from those safe spaces and expressions of indigenous continuity.

Each artist I conversed with moved me in some way, and I used this opportunity to express my appreciation and the reciprocity that Kovach’s conversational method enables. I relayed my own reactions to their work, and how it helped me survive as an indigenous person. I also asked if there was anything that should be included in the conversation that was not covered. My intent was an expression of inclusion towards how the artists see their work and its’ missions, or if they had any other thoughts on the elements of performance I had not considered. This practice and engagement with conversational method in my research design is meant to be inclusive, reciprocal, and open-ended, following on knowledges. I have chosen performance and artistic works as a means to show what is already happening and because, “we are now at point where it is not only Indigenous knowledges themselves that require attention, but the processes in which Indigenous knowledges are generated” (Kovach, p. 13).

Although my writing through this work is primarily for an indigenous audience, it also serves in aiding inter-cultural understanding towards indigenous continuity, struggles, and collectivity in meaning-making for non-Indigenous people across Canada and beyond. My hope is to combat the fear of difference, historical fear and suppression of our ceremonies and gatherings perpetuated throughout time in a western paradigm that continues to fuel colonial mentalities. Kovach writes, “As Indigenous researchers, our responsibility is to assist others to know our worldview in a respectful and responsible fashion (Kovach, p. 14).” In this spirit, I also hope that there emerges an appreciation of difference in the perspective of Canadian history regarding Canada’s assimilation policies. This approach is also meant to honor not only the multi-faceted voices and positions of the artists, but also indigenous ancestral legacy, IKS, healing missions and pools of decolonial thought going on in our communities today. Through these conversations we see some of the values, intentions, and imperatives that persist in their performance practice.

## **1.5 Summery**

The mobilization of indigenous knowledge in performance work brings us into the next century as self-determined people. Indigenous-centered performance with strong leadership and creativity forms a relationship to indigenous *traditions of performance* through time. Pointing to the connections of our current struggles, realities, and collective missions to that of our ancestors, we see that a narrative to resist and refuse annihilation and domination of indigenous people on their own lands and territories has been unfolding over the generations. Further, we draw strength and connections to our ancestors, the metaphysical wisdom that keeps us strong and gives us the vital medicine indigenous people’s need today; Hope.

Our program here is to animate indigenous people within a living framework of continuity and to contextualize a shared history of struggle against colonial trauma; to show how indigenous people are still connected to each other, and our territories through performance and witnessing. This aim includes indigenous decolonial scholarship and thought so that the insidious effects of colonization and colonial thought can be identified and neutralized. Anti-colonial actions and stories also provide a setup for indigenous resurgence, cultural revitalization and a new emergence. In this context, the research frame used is one that supports indigenous continuity, self-determination, and well being. This approach aligns with my intention to do research in a good way.

## Chapter 2: “Interruption Narrative”

Forced settler-colonialism of indigenous lands and people via assimilation policies aimed to erase indigenous people, as well their practices and cultures. Assimilation policies via the Indian Act, attempted to alienate indigenous people from foundational agreements and teachings that guide our relationships to Shonkwaya'tison<sup>6</sup>, the environment, and one another. The colonization of Canada and other commonwealth countries' central mission is total control over lands and assimilation of all peoples within those lands. In 1887, Sir John A MacDonald states, "The great aim of our legislation has been to do away with the tribal system and assimilate the Indian people in all respects with the other inhabitants of the Dominion as speedily as they are fit to change (Joseph, 2012)" Throughout the colonization of North America, many injustices and atrocities towards indigenous people have created unbearable conditions indigenous people have suffered for hundreds of years.

### 2.1 The Psychological Impact of a Single Story

In 2009, Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie gave an important Ted Talk; “The Danger of a Single Story.” It tackles the problem of stories about people that perpetuate stereotypes and “flatten” the complexity of a people’s contextual histories and experiences through dominant narratives of the Other. During her talk, Adichie recounts instances where she was met with such stories about Africans as well as the instances where she recognized that dominant narratives had influenced her views of others and resulted in unfair assumptions. She states, “So that is how to create a single story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing; over and over again, and that is what they become (Adichie, 2009).” This statement is true in the

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<sup>6</sup> Shonkwaya'tison, means Creator in Kanyen'keha (Mohawk language).



context of native people in Canada; only what they have become exists in the minds of Canadians and North Americans today because of one-sided narratives and convoluted histories.

Adichie adds,

It is impossible to talk about “the single story” without talking about power. There is a word, an Igbo word that I think about when I think about the power structures of the world. It is “nkali”...a noun loosely translated, “to be greater than another.” Like our economic and political worlds stories too are defined by the principal of “nkali.” How they are told, who tells them, when they are told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power. Power is the ability not just to tell a story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person<sup>7</sup>(Adichie, 2009)

Adichie’s talk is useful in understanding indigenous people’s psychological struggle over stories “about” us/indigenous people. “The one story,” in an indigenous context in Canada, I call the “colonial interruption narrative.” Colonial interruption narratives arise as a means to dissolve or dilute indigenous cultures and practices, to make way for western ways of being. This interruption narrative places indigenous people as the victims in the struggle over land, rights, culture, and representation, rendering them powerless. Contained within these stories about indigenous people are frameworks of “nkali.” Stories like the vanishing Indian myth, survival of the fittest, and “we won the war against the natives.”<sup>8</sup> overwrite stories of settler genocide in North America. They also flatten and erase indigenous justifications to continue as peoples. Their stories of us are never flattering and never place us as the victors or vindicated. These interruption stories are means to continue colonization and the genocide of indigenous ways of

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<sup>7</sup> For a full version of Adichie’s talk, see:

[https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story#t-828833](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story#t-828833))

<sup>8</sup>I travelled to Seattle, Washington for a Native American academic conference in 2010. While there I spoke with many people who wondered “what” I was. I assumed they meant ethnicity, origin, race or all of the above. When I told them I belong the Mohawk nation, their response, “native Indian? oh we won the war against you guys,” or something similar. I was puzzled and asked what war they were referring to, and they could not be specific. I heard this four times in three days fall of 2010 in the city of Seattle, Washing.

being. They are actors in the deflection of unjust dispossession of lands and inherent rights towards native indigenous people.

The attempted actualization of this currently continues when settlers make such comments as, “native Indian?..I thought they were all dead.”<sup>9</sup> This particular sentiment functions as *erasure*. Erasure narratives correlate with the colonial mind’s fortification of indigenous territories as *terra nullius*, empty lands at the disposal of western progress. Non-indigenous notions of authenticity intrude upon self-determination and attempt to further dictate what it is and means to be indigenous today. Colonial interruption narratives are attempts to *dominate* indigenous people. In this way, settler-colonialism acts as an ultimate teller of stories about indigenous people to other colonizers, new settlers, as well to indigenous people themselves. Every interruption narrative uttered is continuation of settler-colonialism. It is one of the most insidious forms of colonization because in every instance a person tells them, they are degrading indigenous people’s humanities and agreements, or relationships to Shonkwaya’tison. The stories are the lingering and persistent attempts to dominate, harm, and exploit indigenous people; the same intentions made towards the land and carried out in this country every day.

## **2.2 Ceremony and Gathering Ban**

In 1884, Canada, at the young age of 17, passed a measure in the Indian Act that outlawed the Potlatch Ceremony<sup>10</sup> and later included other ceremonies such as the Sweatlodge, Ghost Dance, and Sundance; ceremonies that had been practiced for thousands of years. They

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<sup>9</sup> Many times I have heard this statement when having conversations about identity with non-native people. Each time I’ve heard this lie, it’s shocking because in their minds indigenous people are already dead.

<sup>10</sup> Although this motion was passed in 1884, it was not enacted until January 1, 1885 (Cole & Chaikin, 1990, p. 220).

even went as far as making it illegal to hire lawyers in their legal system, barring accountability for their crimes against indigenous people at that time:

When Aboriginal political organizing became more extensive in the 1920s and groups began to pursue land claims, the federal government added Section 141 to the Indian Act. Section 141 outlawed the hiring of lawyers and legal counsel by Indians, effectively barring Aboriginal peoples from fighting for their rights through the legal system. Eventually, these laws expanded to such a point that virtually any gathering was strictly prohibited and would result in a jail term (Hanson, n.d.a).

The Canadian government made it illegal for more than three “Indians” to gather in one place; a law usually reserved specifically for convicted criminals of organized crime. Banning ceremonies and gathering wasn’t enough. Canadian government made it illegal for indigenous people to gather in order to make sure they were not doing ceremony, and/or collectively planning resistance movements, in response to the dispossession of inherent rights through these violating legislations. Many indigenous people refused to comply. Despite government efforts to oppress indigenous culture and human rights, “The legislation against Aboriginal peoples did not stop Aboriginal practices but in most cases drove them underground, or caused Aboriginal peoples to create new ways of continuing them without facing persecution” (Hanson, n.d.a).

Christianization and colonization worked in tandem to spread fear about indigenous ceremonies, belief systems, and public performances. Suppression in the form of fear, shame, and persecution came through colonial missionaries, including an array of European religious institutions. Here again we see “the principal of ‘nkali’” as these religious institutions, and the government of Canada at the time, attempted wipe out indigenous spirituality and beliefs through religious conversion and the ratification of the Indian Residential School System

The Indian Residential School System<sup>11</sup> was officially ratified through the Indian Act in 1876 (Hanson n.d.b); that's eight years after the ban on ceremonies began. The children who would receive their education through ceremony, performing, and gathering were no longer exposed to those living practices and no longer living among their lands and families. The government took away the children set to inherit the whole system. This complete systematic annihilation of indigenous ways of being with land was most insulting due to government and missionary's notion that "it was for our own good." Perhaps Leanne Simpson best sums up this generational experience with colonial legislation best when she states:

My ancestors resisted and survived what must have seemed like an apocalyptic reality of occupation and subjugation in a context where they had few choices. They resisted by simply surviving and staying alive. They resisted by holding on to their stories. They resisted by talking the seeds of our culture and political systems and packing them away, so that one day another generation of Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg<sup>12</sup> might be able to plant them. I am sure of their resistance because I am here today, living as a contemporary Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg woman (Simpson, 2011, p. 15).

Christianity and settler-colonialism down casting of indigenous people's beliefs and practices towards the earth and the metaphysical (via ceremonies and public performances) affected their abilities to practice these, or forced people deeper into the bush (with the land where ceremonies are practiced), where they could be practiced without persecution. Christian and settler-state "objectives were based on the assumption Aboriginal (indigenous) cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal. Indeed, some (Canadians) sought, as it was infamously said, 'to kill the Indian in the child.' Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has

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<sup>11</sup> More about "The Residential School System," go to:

[http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the\\_residential\\_school\\_system/](http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the_residential_school_system/)

<sup>12</sup> "Michi Saagig Nishnaabeg means the people live or dwell at the mouth of a large river (Simpson, 2011 p.26). This name she uses for the group of Anishnaabeg Leanne Simpson emerges from.

caused great harm, and has no place in our country (nor any indigenous territory)” (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, June 11, 2008).

### **2.2.1 Counter Narrative**

The Native Brotherhood of BC formed in 1931, out of strong opposition towards government policies within the Indian Act from northern First Nations communities such as the Haida and Tsimshian (Native Brotherhood of British Columbia, n.d.). These nations among many others in BC were directly affected by the Potlatch Ban because they are Potlatch people. For a time, the Native Brotherhood was disguised as a religious group as a means to evade the gathering ban. They collaborated to discuss aboriginal title, land, and fishing rights, which they had fought for many years. The meetings opened with Christian hymns that also covered their covert missions.

These acts and history are a counter-narrative to colonial erasure and interruption narratives. They are acts that indigenous people in BC, and arguably across Canada, benefit from to this day. The Native Brotherhood’s mission: “to promote the social, spiritual, economic, and physical conditions of its members, including higher standards of education, health, and living conditions and to cooperate with recognized organizations and Government departments which concern themselves with the advancement of Indian welfare” (Native Brotherhood of British Columbia, n.d)

### **2.3 The Importance of Ceremony and Gathering**

The Potlatch Ban, gathering restriction, and Canada’s Residential School System are significant to my inquiry and focus on indigenous performance. These Canadian legislations directly attacked the element of performing, and the gathering of people to witness and receive

performances that have indigenous imperatives embedded within them. They are the cumulative governmental effort to annihilate indigenous sovereign spaces, dispose inherent rights to gain total control and access to indigenous territories, as well as the total assimilation of indigenous nations to Canadian culture. That is why indigenous performance is connected so deeply to lands and territories. Within this context we can see how gathering for ceremony, public performance events, and festivals are intrinsically connected. These spaces provided youth a means to receive an indigenous education. They also provided a space for adults to model responsibilities that support living and enjoyment. Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete writes,

The ceremony of art inherent in the philosophy and use of art among Indigenous societies presents an essential mind-set for the learning, teaching, and using of art and the making of art in a contemporary educational context for American Indians. Art and the making of art are a natural mode of expression for American Indians whose development and process are intimately intertwined with their spirits and souls (Cajete, 2000, p. 52).

Ceremony and gathering provided access to knowledge holders and space to affirm collective intentions. They are the living systems that embody indigenous history and epistemology.

Canada's failure to complete the colonial project is reflected in the fact that Potlatch, Sundance and other native ceremonies and practices remain. They remain because indigenous people who live on the ground pick up the seeds and replant them, or they live underground with them.

Upon witnessing many performances by the west coast dance group, The Git Hayetsk in Vancouver, the power and effect of their performance is apparent. Dancing with high-end regalia (made by members of the dance group), including masks and ceremonial blankets, the songs and speeches of their presentations are informative about their culture and history. In operation since 2003, the name "Git Hayetsk means "The People of the Copper Shield: in Sm'algyax which is spoken by the Nisga'a, Tsimshian, and Gitksan Nations" (The Git Hayestk

Dancers, n.d.). I asked co-leader of the Git Hayetsk dance group Mique'l Dangeli about her practice of public performance in relation to her ancestors. The following is one part of her response:

For 70 years our dance practices were made illegal in Canada from 1884 to 1951. We're coming up on the 61st year of it being legal for us to do what we do in terms of our ceremonies and also public performances. Public performances were criminalized as well. I really think about the ways that creating new songs and dances [continue]. Just like our totem poles, [they] are continually being created anew to tell different aspects of our history; in relationship to territories, in relationship to one another...memorials for people. With the songs and dances, I have felt that it is within me to continue to create new songs and dances. That's what Mike (her husband and partner) was talking about me seeing the songs and him being able to create those masks that I see in these dances [I choreograph]. This is such a time to where we can create songs that will be ancestral songs one day. To talk about the time in which we are living is a way to continue our ancestor's work of embodying our histories; all parts of our histories, the victories, the challenges; our ways of being in the world today (M. Dangeli [Mique'l], personal communication, March 13, 2016).

Mique'l's testimony illustrates an active participation in an Indigenous Knowledge System set through time. Her artistic practice documents the stories and experiences she has in common with her ancestors in order to leave a legacy for the faces yet to come. Today, ceremonies, festivals, and events continue to be key locations for indigenous resurgence of knowledge systems and legacy. These living spaces reinforce and fortify indigenous agreements, practices, and collective values.

Gathering for indigenous performance and coming together has a positive affect on indigenous people young and old. These are spaces that indigenous people can affirm a native identity in a good way: creating a mind-set for learning how to undo colonial violence. In this context, indigenous gathering serve as anti-colonial spaces. The inclusion of legacy and regard for the future makes indigenous people think deeply about how to live in the world now, so that

the next generations will know the story of us and our ancestors to aid the rejection and refusal of colonial domination over indigenous peoples in every aspect of our being in the world.

Throughout the centuries of imperial and colonial intrusion Indigenous people have had a history of resistance through performance and artistic expression. Activist, poet, and spoken word performer John Trudell was one of the original occupants of the Alcatraz prison island, located in the San Francisco Bay. The American Indian Movement took over the abandoned prison to demand equal and humane treatment of American Indians. In “Reel Injun” movie, a documentary directed by Neil Diamond about the treatment (and the stories they carry) of Indians in film Trudell, a contributor to the film, recounts the aftermath of Wounded Knee in the US, which was a conflict over resource extraction, nepotism within tribal leadership, and the appropriation of sacred lands in Oglala Lakota people’s territory that arose in 1973:

The government wiped out the political movement by the 80’s. But what’s emerging out of that is a cultural artistic voice. And I see it coming, there are more native filmmakers, songwriters...and so out of all that native creativity that’s coming out...see, we will find our voice (Web et. al, 2009).

Freedom of assembly and freedom of artistic expression in western culture today are entitlements taken for granted. Not many non-indigenous Canadians know that indigenous people had to battle for generations for their freedom of assembly. In today’s political economy, freedom of artistic expression, freedom of assembly and the right to peaceful protest are the foundations of the most effective anti-oppression movements today.

Being able to perform indigenous epistemologies today is a major victory for indigenous people. Metis dancer Madelaine McCallum, shares her perspective about her performance work by stating, “I think in the performance and the work that I do empowering the community, young



people, old people, middle-aged people is just by standing on that stage...because a long time ago, we couldn't even perform our dances, [not even] our community dances” (M. McCallum, personal communication, March 12, 2016). She adds a story that recounts the time her audience numbered over 75, 000.

I danced in the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in the opening ceremonies in front of 75,000 people. I remember thinking how many little boys and little girls in my community that are probably thinking, "She came where I'm from, from northern Saskatchewan and she's performing in this huge stadium." I just remember getting overwhelmed when I was in that place because there was so much energy with the people, and all the performers, and then me thinking that we can perform on national television now, and it's empowering me, it's empowering our little people and our ancestors. Because they [the ancestors] are the ones that went through all the pain and the trauma of not being able to do that and being taken away. Now we can we can perform on these big stages and show that it's beautiful and all the indigenous cultures put together are amazing (M.McCallum, March 12, 2016).

Indigenous cultures are amazing indeed. Feeling a sense of pride for these victories, Madelaine stands in place of her ancestors that struggled through these laws and unfair treatment. Her performance on “the big stage” is the result of a generational, cumulative, and continent-wide effort to resist laws of oppression and a refusal to end indigenous ceremonies and community gathering.

The XXI Olympic Winter Games held in Vancouver, BC in February, 2010 brought up many contentious issues for the multiple indigenous nations within Vancouver and surrounding area, including the “Four Host First Nations (FHFN),” the Lil’Wat, Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh bands (Martin, 2010). The production and presentation of any Olympic Games normally demands a demonstration of local culture and national pride in the host city and nation. A hard fight for positioning and meaningful participation in the games won the FHFN a large representation within the games (among other accommodations). Many native and non-native

people protested and boycotted the games. Some out of anger of the hypocrisy of displaying indigenous culture as the gem of Canada, while historical suppression of indigenous culture including real and consequential dispossession of indigenous lands went unacknowledged for the game's sake. While others took issue with the growing gentrification in the Down Town East Side (DTES), that had resulted and the subjugation of the communities' impoverished, including the displacement of the DTES homeless community.

Madelaine's motives for participating in the opening ceremonies of the Olympics bring the subject matter back to her community. While she performed in the opening ceremonies, Madelaine's thoughts were directed towards her Metis relatives and in the pride that children from her community would gain in seeing her dance on an international stage surpass any political clout indigenous or otherwise. In this context Madelaine claims victory for the many ancestors whose public performances were prohibited. This counter-narrative gains indigenous people a position of strength. When we tell our own stories, erasure and interruption narratives are dispelled.

## **2.4 Providing Space: Rejecting the Colonial Recognition Paradigm**

Indigenous people have been gathering to share knowledge since the time when our creation stories began. The exploration of indigenous-centered spaces of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, through event-based performance, marks a continuation of indigenous culture. When specifically delivered to indigenous communities, indigenous intellectual traditions require participation and consent and rely on a reciprocal and symbiotic exchange. Thus we are recognizing one another, rather than waiting for colonizers to *grant* us recognition. This space rejects the power dynamic of colonial recognition constructs riddled in indigenous-Canadian relations. Dene academic Glen Coulthard extensively discusses the problems that have risen throughout Indigenous-Canadian

relations in the struggle to overcome the present day impact of Canadian settler-colonialism in adding to *Fanonian* literature. In *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, Coulthard (2014) discusses the politics round “settler-state” mis-or nonrecognition, accommodation in the reconciliation discourse regarding indigenous inherent rights and the abuse of power by the Canadian government. Coulthard writes

... What Fanon’s work does is redirect our attention to the host of *self-affirming* cultural practices that colonized peoples often critically engage in to *empower themselves*, as opposed to relying too heavily on the subjectifying apparatus of the states or other dominant institutions of power to do this for them. In doing so, Fanon’s position challenges colonized peoples to transcend the fantasy that settler-state apparatus- as a structure of domination *predicated* on our ongoing dispossession- is somehow capable of producing laboratory effects. (Coulthard, 2014, p 23).

Indigenous people do not need the recognition of “settler-state apparatus” to activate or restore indigenous nations’ aim towards self-determination, health and healing. Rejecting the recognition paradigm of outsiders to indigenous culture and intent to continue as people is the rejection of domination. In the context of performance and performing, this process requires acts of sharing honed gifts such as singing, dancing, music, and oration in which Indigenous people find empowerment and restitution. It is like coming home. People attending these events are consenting to being influenced by indigenous culture.

## **2.5 Our Ancestors are Always There for Us**

Indigenous people have a plethora of different beliefs and belief systems. Even within nations, different beliefs are carried through and actualized in their way of being; how they live day-to-day with and through all creation across time. Many Indigenous people believe in super-being/s who are responsible for the inception of reality and all that makes it. Each nation has their own word in their language for Creator Beings. Indigenous people have original, or

foundational agreements with Creator Beings. These relationships, teachings, laws, songs, and stories govern actions, attitudes, and behaviors towards many vital aspects of our living such as Yethinihsténha onhwentsya.<sup>13</sup> These agreements and relationships are normally actualized through the performance of ceremony and in other indigenous gatherings. These agreements are sometimes in the form of teachings and/or stories.

I refer to Shonkwaya'tison, the Creator, healing, and the ancestors throughout this work because they are embedded within an indigenous epistemology that references the metaphysical nature or aspects of indigenous expression. The expression of these relationships forms a part of culture. Practicing indigenous culture is an affirmation and actualization of the collective memoires, original agreements, and relationships indigenous people have with all creation and 'all their relations.' Cherokee author and storyteller Thomas King (1990) provides an in-depth understanding of the concept of "all my relations" that points to the breadth of relations and relationships indigenous people come to know:

"All my relations" is that first reminder of who we are and of our relationship with both our family and our relatives. It also reminds us of the extended relationships we share with all human beings. But the relationships that native people see go further, the web of kinship extending to animals, to the birds, to the fish, to the plants, to all animate and inanimate forms that can be seen or imagined. More than that, "all my relations" is an encouragement for us to accept the responsibilities we have within this universal family by living our lives in a harmonious and moral manner (King, 1990, p. ix).

Indigenous Knowledge (IK) in its many forms is passed on from indigenous ancestors. One of the questions in this inquiry as mentioned above with Miquel's response is if the artist considered their ancestors in relationship to their work in performance to nest ancestral knowledge and influence within an oral based IKS. I asked the artists how their artwork might be

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<sup>13</sup> Yethinihsténha onhwentsya means "Our Mother, the Earth.

related to the work or knowledge of their ancestors to draw out endearment and reverence towards indigenous ancestors, ancestral knowledge, and legacies. This ontological aspect shows that indigenous ancestral knowledge remains through indigenous performance, performers, and oral traditions today. In this way, we acknowledge that ancestral knowledge exist within us while living in our cotemporary realities; indigenous knowledge remains because indigenous ancestors meant to pass on our cultures and ways of being. I also include indigenous ancestors because they were real people, we loved them, and indigenous people continue to tell stories about them. Indigenous people strongly believe in the presence of their ancestors because they left us a way of being still precious, still endearing.

Reverence towards indigenous ancestors is reflected in our remembering them.

Madelaine relates the journey of her life and relationship to performance in the flowing life story:

When I dance, I feel like all of my ancestors are with me. Growing up, I had my mom in my life a little bit here and there, to tell me you can jig, but nobody to nurture that. Nobody to say, 'okay I'm gonna take you to practice and help you.' I always felt like I just watch something I could do that. I always wondered where that came from. Who was guiding me? Who was helping me? Who was telling me I could do this? Even though nobody could physically tell me they believed in me, somebody, or something was telling they believed in me and to keep going - to dance. I was that kid in the community that danced. I know one hundred percent that my Kookum,<sup>14</sup> Madeleine, who I'm named after, was with me. I think she's been my guiding spirit; you know, my parent. She's been like my parent. I truly believe that my ancestors dance through me to this day. Because the gift of dance, with gifted to me, from them. They probably dance in the spirit world, but physically they can't so, they get to work through me. When I dance it's like I get lightheaded and it's like I get to this other place, it's like a meditation state. It's such a healing state when I get there I know that they are working through me when I dance (M. McCallum, personal communication, March 12, 2016).

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<sup>14</sup> Kookum means grandmother in the Cree language.

Madelaine speaks to a legacy of ancestors that work through her; her work and artistic practice is an embodiment and continuation of the dancing medicine that her ancestors intended for their people. The belief in ancestral guidance and presence of her ancestors in those moments of dancing extends to a “feeling” of being supported by her grandmother, her namesake Madelaine Larson, a Cree/Metis woman from Northern Saskatchewan.

This relationship with ancestors also illuminates how Madelaine’s practice and gift of dance continues the work of her ancestors. Madelaine’s endearment towards her ancestors also combats the attempted interruption of those relationships of love and endearment towards ancestors, the knowledge and ways of being they meant to pass on and, by extension, reverence and respect towards indigenous cultures that embody those relationships. Her belief, experiences, knowledge, and expression of endearment are aspects of indigenous continuity we can learn from because they combat the break up of indigenous generational relationship with ancestors and the faces yet to come. The love they shared in both their living and in their culture therefore extends into Madelaine’s generation, or into the present.

### **2.5.1 Affirmation**

I acknowledge and affirm the love, hard work, and knowledge passed to my being from my ancestors. When I feel their love, it re-connects me to the Good Mind teachings and healthy state of being.

## **2.6 Telling the Stories of Our Ancestors**

All the artists involved with this project responded with at least one story of their ancestors and close relatives. Telling stories of indigenous ancestors is a practice that helps us connect to their knowledges, experiences, and teachings. Remembering them and the things they did also

mediates generational knowledge transmission. This knowledge transmission is a vital part of IKS. Of stories and our ancestors' experiences, Jo-ann Archibald writes,

I believe that understandings and insights also result from lived experiences and critical reflections on those experiences. Many Aboriginal people have said that to understand ourselves and our situation today, we must know where we come from and know what has influenced us. The historical effects of colonization and assimilation still affect our people and communities today. Elder's life stories can show how we, as indigenous people, survived and how we keep our cultural knowledge intact. Their life stories depict resilience and resistance to colonization (Archibald, 2008, pp. 42-43).

### **2.6.1 Two Ancestral Life Stories**

Mike Dangeli:

My great-great-grandfather, Charlie Barton, he was what we call a Gitnotk. Our Gitnotk are a secret society of artists and carvers. The opposite side of that coin is a Halaayt which [is a title] Mique'l took on, and I took on the title of Gitnotk. My great-great-grandfather wrote and composed songs...During the potlatch ban he traveled with the Vaudeville Theater, was a fire-thrower, sword-swallower, and did other Gitnotk things. For myself, there hasn't been a Gitnotk in my family since the late 1800s early 1900s. So I'm picking up where he left off to be able to create our Nox Nox (masks/dance masks, also meaning power, or supernatural power) and even go beyond in the direction that I hope he would be proud of (M. Dangeli, personal communication, March 13, 2016).

Mike's story about his maternal great-great grandfather, Charlie Barton and his role as a Gitsontk indicates that his traveling and performing in the Vaudeville Theatre, sword swallowing and fire-throwing are within the scope of being a Gitsontk: "An exclusive society of powerful carvers among the Tsimshian, Nisga'a, and Gitksan people, the Gitsontk made objects that were used in the dancing and initiation ceremonies of secret societies (Askren, 2006, p. 57)." Further in this decolonial work, stating that Charlie embraced new practices with the Vaudeville Theatre breaks down the limitations imposed on indigenous people.

Mike's story involves a gap in time where there were no Gitsontk in his family. Mike's decision to take on this role moves him further from decolonization to indigenous cultural

revitalization. His decision to be a Gitsonk in “a way that would make him [Charlie Barton] proud” is an aspiration towards endearment and appreciation for the hardship and victories left by Charlie Barton through Charlie’s actions and the stories that remain about his work.

Part 2 of Mique’l’s relating her work to her ancestors:

One of the songs that comes to mind is our photographer’s song that we do that’s based on my Masters thesis research on an indigenous Tsimshian photographer named Benjamin Alfred Haldane. He started a portrait studio in our community in Metlakatla, Alaska in 1899. He was kicked out of school by the missionary, William Duncan, because anyone that had aptitude academically was a threat to his authority so he would kick them out of school so that they wouldn’t reach a level of education that was beyond his. Benjamin Alfred Haldane, B.A. as our community called him, he used money that he made at the cannery to save up to buy camera equipment and teach himself not only how to use camera equipment but also how to compose music. So he just did all this homeschooling in these interests of his. These photographs that he took in our community show the way in which our people continued to practice Tsimshian ways of being in the world, rights and inheritance, under the guise of Christian practices during the time that they were illegal in our community under the reign of missionary William Duncan.

So to take that history and to dance his photographs the way that all of the tools and technologies that come into our world - we indigenize. Before the term indigenization was even around, it’s just a way of being, in that our ancestors have an ancient practice of making the contemporary our own. Whether you want to say ‘making the contemporary our tradition,’ or playing with the words as Mike and I do to say that ‘we are traditionally contemporary people.’ Where I see our work with the Git Hayetsk; the time period in which we live in we are not isolated within our communities because of the diaspora that was caused by colonization. Even when we were in our communities we weren’t that isolated from one another. There has always been a tremendous amount of exchange between our nations.

Now within the 50 members of our dance group, we have 11 different nations. Rather than saying this is only going to be a Nisga’a dance group...this is only going to be a Tsimshian dance group, we’re open to all of these nations because this is what makes our community today. To have that inclusiveness that is reflective of our societies rather than imposing structures around it, to say that, no we just need to be of one nation because really, that type of mentality...it serves a purpose in terms of perpetuating songs and dances that are of that nation, but it’s very much informed by the colonial mentality of having to choose and to just be one thing (M. Dangeli [Mique’l], personal communication, March 13, 2016).

Mique’l sets up a historical context for her story about Benjamin Alfred Haldane (B.A. for short), by noting the banning of public performances via the Potlatch Ban. She also notes that



colonial behaviors towards B.A. in his dismissal from school by missionary William Duncan. This indicates a critical reflection of colonial actions towards Tsimshian people in Canadian history. This awareness is an important step in decolonization. Being aware of these actions, attitudes and behaviors against indigenous people throughout time prepares current generations' a narrative of resistance and how indigenous people today are related to these histories.

B.A.'s self-taught photography profession (among others) shows a determination to incorporate new technology and tools for Tsimshian people. Indigenizing western technologies and practices are observed through time in her Storywork about B.A. Further, B.A.'s photography practices provided important documentation of Tsimshian life and activities as "B.A.'s photography was also used by members of our (Tsimshian) community to assert ceremonial and hereditary privileges (Dangeli, 2015, p. 227)." B.A.'s photography adds innovation to ways in which Tsimshian document their histories and shows how Tsimshian continued their ways of being through time.

These two stories depict how indigenous people have resisted colonization. They give insights into the many ways indigenous people use new tools and innovations. Both Mike and Mique'l's observations and critical eye are practices we can learn from. Both stories reference the time of the potlatch ban and that "those government policies against us did not work" (M. Dangeli [Mike], personal communication, March 13, 2016). Mike further adds, "I feel like it's made us stronger" (M. Dangeli [Mike], 2016).

In the subsequent discussion of these two stories, Mique'l speaks richly of their people's ability to be make the contemporary their tradition, or of their people being "traditionally contemporary" through time. Vine Deloria Jr. writes, "In formulating their understanding of the

world, Indians did not discard any experience. Everything had to be included in the spectrum of knowledge and related to what was already known” (Deloria, 1999, p. 44). Both Mike and Mique’l act on these ancestral life stories, and the concepts, and practices within them in their way of leading their west coast dance group, The Git Hayetsk. Allowing their dance group’s membership to reflect the diversity of nations in the Vancouver area embraces the inter-tribal reality of indigenous people and is the mobilization of teachings left to them by Charlie Barton and B.A. This inclusionary practice also shows an appreciation for diversity.

Keeping ancestors in mind while being cognitive of the future generations is an indigenous value system that keeps respect and honor of past and future relatives in the constant present. The memory of ancestors live within stories carried and told about them. These stories generate pride, positive self-esteem and create a part of a collective memory and shared history. Expanding on self-esteem, this generational value system can draw in a sense of communal-esteem, once individual and collective meaning is connected and expressed through the stories of our ancestors.

## **Chapter 3: Creations Stories, Oral Traditions and the Economy of Knowing**

THERE IS A STORY I KNOW. It's about the earth and how it floats in space on the back of the turtle. I've heard this story many times, and each time someone tells the story, it changes. Sometimes the change is simply in the voice of the storyteller. Sometimes the change is in the details...but in all of the tellings of all the tellers, the world never leaves the turtle's back. And the turtle never swims away.

One time, it was in Lethbridge I think, a young boy in the audience asked about the turtle and the earth. If the earth was on the back of the turtle, what was below the turtle? Another turtle the storyteller told him. And below that turtle? Another turtle. And below that? Another turtle. (King, 2003, p. 31)

The inherent and infinite notion of the many layers of turtles in Thomas King's writing about a creation story is a helpful in way of understanding myself as Turtle Clan person. It took many layers of turtle clan people's love, knowledge, and energy so that I could live as a Mohawk person today; all of this composes an ancestral legacy. Like us, the ancestors have endured much change, hardship, and loss. The notion of continuity also found within King's writing evokes a reminder of that legacy we are continuing and benefiting from. Of creation stories in particular, King says, "Personally, I'd want to hear a creation story, a story that recounts how the world was formed, how things came to be, for contained within creation stories are relationships that help to define the nature of the universe and how cultures understand the world in which they exist (King, 2003, p. 10)." King's statement points to the function of creation story that extends a relationship to the universe itself. The knowledge creation holds is continually unfolding as we indigenous people are continually coming into being. We are continually creating and recreating our realities. Together.

### **3.1 The Continuation of Our Oral Traditions**

Creation and re-Creations stories are oral traditions that are found in virtually every Indigenous culture. Indigenous traditions such as oral traditions are acts and practices that

provide a vehicle for transferring knowledge, knowledge practices, feelings, and everything knowing can express.

Songs, stories, dances, carvings, oral traditions, and ceremonies are among many methods used to maintain knowledge and fortify indigenous worldviews. They are means of remembering and collective meaning making. The production and maintenance of oral traditions pass through generations in their telling. They include knowledge about how we came to be, (like creation stories), stories of great change, and the experiences of our ancestors. I call this “ancestral knowledge” which is one form of IK and provides the basis of epistemic knowledge; how we understand our realities of existence. Further on oral traditions, Acoma Pueblo scholar and poet, Simon Ortiz writes:

Oral tradition is inclusive; it is the action, behaviors, relationship, practices throughout the whole social, economic, and spiritual life process of people. I think at times “oral tradition” is defined too strictly in term of verbal-vocal manifestations in stories, songs, meditations, ceremonies, ritual, philosophies, and clan and tribal histories passed from older generation to the next...Oral tradition evokes and expresses a belief system (Ortiz, 1992, p. 7).

To further examine how oral traditions are connected to the current production of IK found in indigenous performance we must look to how they are congruent with ancestral traditions; examine how the dualities of performance and presence are linked to accountability and integrity. The act of Witnessing<sup>15</sup> found in the traditions of coastal First Nations in BC is one

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15 Coastal First Nations in Canada and US, hold Potlatches and Feasts. These are sites where many public declarations are made. Within this First Nations coastal tradition, invited guests (people of high standing and community member from neighboring regions) are asked to stand as witnesses to the events and declarations of the House or family hosting the Potlatch or Feast. This official work is circumscribed at or near the beginning of the event in question, and concludes with the called witnesses reciting what they have witnessed. This serves to create checks and balances within the integrity of the work presented, such as name giving, and also serves as a function of carrying forth the knowledge and work into the future. In the case where there may be a contestation of that work, the hosts call upon the witnesses as confirmation of the work (Carlson, Malloway, Lutz, Cameron, Harper, & Thom, 1997).

example of how indigenous performance today is congruent with oral cultures, ancestral knowledge and practice. The element of accountability in the knowledge presentation is amplified when a performer is presenting in the presence of an audience. Performers are conscious of what they say and how they say it because the community is there to witness.

Face-to-face interaction and eye contact within the practice of oral performance is coupled with presence: of actually being present to witness. This gives added meaning to the term, “real time,” as Indigenous performers and presenters must be ‘real,’ or ‘integral’ with their community and audience while operating *in* ‘real time.’ Thus performance’s duality includes presence. When performing, being present with the community calls integrity as a value into the environment.

Orality in Indigenous performance is significant today because of the ancestral connections to oral cultures. Oral traditions are a vital part of IKS. They function as both cultural affirmation, and means of knowledge dissemination within Indigenous collectives and community. Hip Hop artist, spoken word poet, and community activator, Ronnie Dean Harris speaks to the influences of his family and oral tradition in relation to his artistic productions in Hip Hop:

My grandmother was the one who got me into music. She always bought me instruments. She always had records and listened to music. My grandparents challenged me to think and challenged me to speak. I remember being young and my grandmother made me watch people speak. When I was in my teenage years, she would make me get up, like at funerals, and speak. I didn't know what to say, but you know what to say because you heard it before.

My grandmother, in her efforts to find resurgence and resiliency of her own cultural backgrounds, took me a long with her to that. I remember her being kind of Catholic when I was little to going to her death not wanting anything to do with the church there. So I experienced that growth with her until she passed away. It starts with her for me. Her teaching

me traditional cultural values and giving me that jumping point towards finding my own indigeneity.

I don't think Hip Hop is the hundred percent focal point of how I figure out who I am as an indigenous person but it's a huge part about it. It's part of who we are. I tried to put cultural values into some of the things I say. I think arbitrarily the way we think, the consciousness that I have, is highly indigenous. I look at Hip Hop as this totemic expression. When I rap, I can carve totems that have multidimensional meaning. Galactic universal concepts condensed into formula. Which is the same thing as indigenous thought, it's the same thing as oral tradition; it had to be condensed to pass it on. The way I write, I try to encode things and carve these visions out of huge concepts that are indigenous in practice. Because English is spoken differently than my indigeneity thinks and expresses itself, I have to carve it out of this new material called the English language and translate it to people (R. Harris, personal communication, February 13, 2016).

There are many decolonial lesson to this life story of Ronnie Harris and Lorena Thomas (Ronnie's maternal grandmother). His journey towards cultural revitalization experienced along side Lorena Thomas' saw an eventual rejection of colonial religious institution in favour of indigenous culture and ways of being. Lorena's insistence on his watching people speak, and speaking in cultural contexts such as funerals, initiated and honed an indigenous leadership training for Ronnie. This story also confirms how oral traditions make their way through challenges such as the English language, give insight to how oral traditions can take huge concepts and encode them with "multidimensional meaning." This particular intellectual feature of oral traditions continues to inform the formulation of IK.

Oral tradition is an intellectual tradition practiced through time and is reflected in the creative works of our artistic performers today. They empower Indigenous communities and are delivered through stories, dances, and performance. They provide the knowledge and means to be fully integrated and naturalized into our persisting environments. They give clues into the fluidity of IK and its dynamic traits. We draw upon expressions of knowledge or knowledge traditions such as oral traditions, stories, ceremonies, and teachings to guide values and model

learning. Stories are a means to remembering IK. IK enables the survival of the physical environment and the overall survival of people. Oral traditions are the economy of our knowing.

### **3.2 Empowerment of Indigenous Knowledge and Mobilization Today**

Struggles against colonization and assimilation are a major theme within today's context of indigenous performance, but not limited to resisting colonization. Some artistic performance creations are meant to motivate and express indigenous beauty and victory. Indigenous performance is a dynamic and diverse way of expression. This dynamic knowledge expression is a force that stimulates change within a system or process and can engage more than one type of knowing through performance. Performance provides a means of gaining experiential knowledge for both the performer and audience. The community members receiving or witnessing this type of performance have an increased probability of remembering it, because it is relevant to their lives, and watching it employs more than one aspect of one's being such as emotion. Performance can add elements like movement and body/physical knowledge; this is especially empowering when done as a community such as Round Dance, explained below.

The role performance played in the Idle-no-more movement<sup>16</sup> is perhaps the most recent example of utilizing performance-based practices to empower and unify Indigenous people. This unification was sparked by the Canadian Federal Government's decision to pass the Jobs and Growth Act, omnibus Bill c-45, a bill that changed the laws that govern indigenous lands and waterways among others. Coulthard writes, "Bill C-45 thus represents the latest installment of Canada's longstanding policy of colonial dispossession" (Coulthard, 2014, p. 128). This umbrella bill had opened the floodgates in pursuit of oil revenue and other economic pursuits

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<sup>16</sup> For more about the Idle-no-more Movement see: *The Winter We Danced: Voices From the Past, the Future, and the Idle No More Movement*.

placing once protected waterways in jeopardy. The movement was also antagonized by the unbearable housing and living conditions of native communities, in sub-zero temperatures in the north, particularly Attawapiskat in Northern Ontario. This particular situation was exacerbated with media and government blaming the indigenous community of Attawapiskat for their condition. Indigenous people and their allies rallied together in flash mobs to perform Round Dance, Pow Wow culture, and communal or public songs and prayer circles in shopping malls and key government buildings<sup>17</sup> during the fall and winter months of 2012/2013. They also performed on Parliament Hill to show opposition to the government's colonial oppression and further dispossession of Indigenous rights. Particularly the march to Parliament Hill showed mass opposition among the indigenous population to the government's plan to exploit the earth and set aside indigenous rights to clean waterways and pristine landscapes within traditional territories.

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<sup>17</sup> See list of flash mobs across Canada in, "Round Dance Revolution: Idle No More" by Rayn McMahan, pp. 101-102.



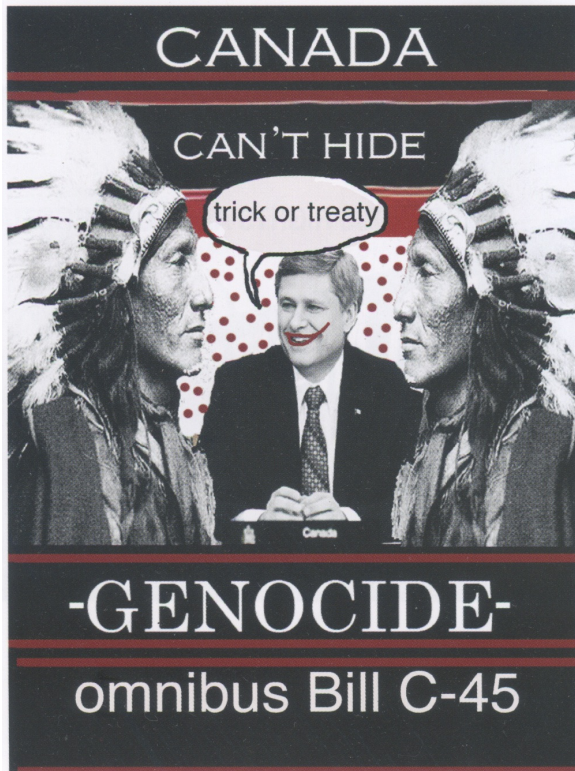


Fig. 1. The Idle-no-more Movement compelled artist to use many forms of expression in opposition to bill c-45. This image titled “Bill c45” – a poster created by Tannis Nielson, can be found among many in *The Winter We Danced: Voices From the Past, The Future and the Idle No More Movement* ([The] Kino-nda-niimi Collective, 2012, p. 252).

### 3.2.1 A Round Dance Revolution

The Round Dance is a friendship dance where indigenous people join hands, dance in a circle to signify the goodwill Indigenous people have towards each other. Choosing to display the spirit of friendship interrupts the norms of a public space. It also shares the beauty and strength of Indigenous culture with the public who participate as witnesses to these peaceful acts of resistance; an alternative to a direct confrontation and violence. These communal performance displays of resistance send the message that Indigenous ways of knowing have not been erased and that First Nations can emerge in any space to preserve an important part of our existence: our rights that extend from being Indigenous people of the land. It's the *protection* of our cultures and practices. This aided indigenous pride and strength to rise and flourish very quickly during those winter months. Anishinaabe comedian, writer, media maker, and community activator,

Ryan McMahon reflects on why this movement and subsequent actions matter to indigenous people;

We are Indigenous Peoples of this land. We have held unique world-views and cultural and spiritual practices for thousands of years. So many of these practices included drums. As kids, we are told that the drum represents the heartbeat of Mother Earth. We were told our songs come from Mother Earth. We are told that our communities are only as strong as the sound of our drums. Then “they” came. And many of our drums went silent. Completely silent. Our songs were banned. Torn from our lives. Forcefully. Violently. But although they were silent for a time, our old people kept their bundles. Some hid them. Some buried them. Then slowly, the sound of our drums re-emerged. They started to spread through our communities again. They signaled hope. They signaled our return. Our drums were being used. And we began to gather again. We danced again. And our communities are slowly regaining their strength. It’s perfect. It makes perfect sense. *A Round Dance Revolution*. It has reinvigorated and re-inspired our People. It has lifted the spirit of thousands. The act of the “flash mob” can be called “Political/Guerilla Theatre” but it’s politics in and of itself. It’s a glimpse into who we are. It is perfect (McMahon, 2014, p. 100).

Everyone felt uplifted and united through movement and song; through that physical movement and unity, many indigenous people felt hope return. Songs, dance, stories, and IK, delivered through Indigenous performance are inalienable to their carriers. McMahon adds, “We were being lead by our drums. It’s perfect, it’s accessible. It’s transportable. It’s cheap (hey we’re on a budget, ya know). And it’s a whole new form of direct action, protest, and resistance. (McMahon, p.100).” Round Dance came together so quickly in Idle No More because this friendship dance had been performed throughout time. This is indigenous mobilization of a cultural practice through performance on a mass scale.

When we practice culture such as Round Dance, Pow Wow, Big House and Longhouse dancing, we dance the way our ancestors did. This gives us a connection to them and their intent of our continuity. Performance and oral traditions integrate our cultures then and now. Performing and witnessing indigenous culture honours the beauty of our cultures that continue to

make us the distinct people we are. No matter what forms they take, mass scale performance is an indication that we, like our ancestors, are interested in everything happening in our territories.

### **3.3 Creating Cultural Societies and Communities**

Performance-based events such as the Idle No More flash mobs are positive and empowering spaces where a shared sense of positive identity, dignity, and the creation of a safe place for cultural expression prevail. These are spaces where Indigenous people can express themselves and their position within the greater society as people with a complex identity, political history, and background. Many who participate in urban cultural communities can have complex identities, dualities, origins, and historical backgrounds. Indigenous people have been affected by colonization and the identity dysphoria that it brings. We all have a story of how colonization has affected us on individual and collective levels. On collective meaning Simpson writes:

The performance of our “theories” and thought is how we collectivize meaning. This is important because our collective truths as a nation and as culture are continuously generated from those individual truths we carry around inside ourselves. Our collective truths exists in a nest of individual diversity (Simpson, 2011, p. 43).

These new narratives are a part of our collective account of, and response to colonization.

Performances of Idle No More are the result of ancestral resistance to the Potlatch and ceremony ban. Buried or convoluted Indigenous identities can be recovered, or revitalized through witnessing performance and experiencing the person-to-person contact that surrounds it, by being in and with indigenous community. The creation of this safe performance space can enable the emergence of cultural identity. Native people who have been kept away from their histories and ancestral knowledge via residential schools, relocation programs, fostered care system, inter-family indigenous identity suppression, and adoption can attach themselves to Indigenous

ideologies within the content of the performances and through exposure to the practices themselves. Chris Anderson (2013) discusses ‘urban Aboriginality’ as a distinct identity. His findings debate the complexities of cultural diversity within urban centers. On the positive side, Anderson quotes Silver in the following:

However, others consider this diversity to be a source of power that urban Aboriginal communities can use to develop and strengthen themselves: ‘there are no quick easy solutions for Aboriginal people in Winnipeg’s inner city, or in other similar urban centres. But a unique path to a better future is being built here, and creative urban Aboriginal people are both the engineers and the builders (Silver et al., 2008, pp. 38-39) (as cited in Anderson, 2013, p.54).

This open cultural reconceptualization of identity is void of the constraints found within other practices such as Smoke House and Sweatlodge ceremonies that can be private, family oriented, or invite-only. It is the publishing of our way of being today. These indigenous publications are an invitation for the lost relatives to come home to our “loving cultures,” to witness indigenous performances. In this context, Indigenous performance has the potential to heal families, individuals, and cultures impacted by Residential Schools System, foster-care system, and cultural suppression.

### **3.4 Generative Spaces of Hope**

Performance is an act that engages the body, mind, and emotions. It engages the body by movement, the mind by the driving intellect, and the emotions by evocation through content or purpose of performance because indigenous people are personally and historically attached. Presenting Indigenous-centered performance as holistic knowledge affirms the value of engaging in this way. Performance is restoring and re/storying Indigenous people to health and living from merely coping and surviving. Although Indigenous realities are changed from that of our

ancestors, what indigenous people do with our current realities and circumstances is what makes us distinctly indigenous.

Madeline speaks to her teaching practice with Métis Jigging. She states,

There's a huge majority of Métis people that have just found out they're Métis because of the pain from before where nobody wanted to talk about it. Then there's the ones he grew up in the communities like myself, [and] I feel so grateful...I grew up in a Métis community, in a settlement...you take those things for granted until you hear the stories [of indigenous identity diaphora]...The people who just found out they're Métis, they're so eager. They want to learn how to jig. They're always like "I want to feel that Métis spirit. When you're dancing Maddy, you *are* the Métis spirit," I hear these funny things and I'm like wow these are things I never think of - but people see that.

The Métis people who are just figuring it out, they want that connection so badly because they've always felt it throughout their lives and they wanted it so they come up and they ask me, almost like I can give it to them as a gift (laughs). But I teach it, and I don't teach them to have a Métis spirit, I teach them about connecting to their spirit. People think you can just come in and teach it, or performance it. No, there is a connection when you move in that style... I find that there're different reactions to it (Metis Jigging)...I think they're all great because it shows that we are all still healing; because the ones who've just figured out they're Métis, that's healing. That's medicine, and if Métis jigging is something they want to connect them with their spirit, I want to help them find that gift within themselves. (M. McCallum, Personal communication, March 12, 2016).

What dancing teaches us is how to connect with our spirit, or to spirit. This knowledge is usually experienced through feeling. Singing also does this but when combined with song writing or storytelling it can convey a feeling and a history passed on. Singing and dancing together can produce a powerful collective connection with our spirit, each other and many other things/aspects in creation, such as the land. In every way, Indigenous performance is generative of the feelings, messages, and connections needed to continue our indigenous of knowing and being. The generative aspect of these performances is a way of knowing that can connect further to maximizing indigenous potential to know, experience, explore and express knowledge forms available to us in all creation: like emotion, kinetic energy, and the projection or sharing of these.

Sharing is a practical and loving way of amplifying and growing these knowledge forms. Movement/dancing, sound/energy, and intentions, via intentional connectedness add layers of knowing when done in combination, which makes forms of indigenous performance and performing, such as Metis jigging, and Pow-Wow multi-faceted ways of knowing. Sometimes it is a mass of people connecting with their ancestral knowledge through dancing and signing. Indigenous performance and performing are pathways of knowing that can heal colonial trauma. Victory dances and songs are particularly empowering. I call these generative spaces of hope: The kindergarten for indigenous potential, growth, and connection. Leanne Simpson tells her people's creations story in the following excerpt:

The next part of the story, after Gzhwe Mindoo<sup>18</sup> has lowered me to the earth, tells me that Gzhwe Mindoo puts his right hand on my forehead and s/he transferred all Gzhwe Mindoo's thoughts into me. There were so many, that the thoughts couldn't just stay in my head: they spilled into every part of my being and filled up my whole body. Gzhwe Mindoo's knowledge was so immense that it took all my being to embody it (Simpson, 2011, p. 42).

From this story, I get a sense of the immensity of knowledge that exists in creation. This story not only connects and relates us to it, but it also speaks to knowledge we hold; knowledge that is within all aspects of our being human. It takes not just the body or DNA passed to us from our ancestors, but also opens the exponential possibilities of knowledge that our mind, body, emotions, and spirit hold. We are the product of many layers of knowledge in all aspects of knowing and being.

### **3.4.1 The Affects of Energy Exchange: *"We Are Dancing Medicine"***

When I asked Madeline what elements of performance she appreciates, she gave this perspective:

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<sup>18</sup> Gzhwe Mindoo, Anishinaabe word for Creator.

When I perform, the most amazing part of it is the magic of performance. Its not just you doing an action, there's magic that happens that's invisible. Métis jigging is so happy. If you hear the fiddle music, you can't help but to clap your hands, stomp your feet and give a 'Yeehaw!' People just want to yell, hoot and holler.

I truly believe in the vibration. We talk about energy, as indigenous people; the many vibrations. As soon as you start dancing you are changing the vibration of yourself, of your energy, and it's affecting the whole space. You are affecting the whole room just by changing your [own] vibration. That's how we can change people's lives; we can impact people's day, just for a moment [we can ease] the sadness or, what they're carrying in that moment.

There was an elder in a wheelchair. I could see him when I was jigging on the stage. To acknowledge people when you're dancing; it's almost like you're giving them an invisible hug, or your heart is touching their heart...I got off the stage and I was really pumped up after dancing. He came up to me and said, "you're my daughter." I knew that he meant something much deeper than just 'you're my daughter.' He said, "when I see you, I'm jigging with you. I can feel my feet jigging with you. I'm beside you." I was really young. I was 22/23. I kinda understood what he meant, but when I came to reflect, I knew that this is indigenous knowledge. This is so much more than the physical dance; this is healing. This is medicine. Now in this day and age, I like to say 'we're walking medicine.' We're dancing medicine. We're these bundles; we're these medicine pouches. As soon as we dance and perform we just open up with this medicine and it impacts the whole room and it's healing. I think definitely when I'm dancing...I'm totally a channel. We all are when we performed, that's our place as a channel where we get to change our frequency. We get to do the work that the elders, our ancestors used to do a long time ago. Where we used to do our healing; and that was a part of the healing was when we perform. We're not just there to do a performance. It's so much deeper and bigger than all of us (M. McCallum, Personal communication. March 12, 2016).

Madelaine speaks of healing, an imperative that emerges again as an intention for indigenous people. The emotion or feeling of dancing in her Metis jigging is an indication that emotional intelligence is being engaged *through* a powerful connection to her audience and her work as an indigenous woman in performance. From the testimony above, her dance practice evokes the positive spectrum of emotions.<sup>19</sup> Activating positive emotions combats the effects of Post

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<sup>19</sup> Positive spectrum emotions are the many emotions that make a person feel good or positive. This can mean joy, love, healing, pride and gratitude among others.

Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD),<sup>20</sup> a condition where feeling a negative of spectrum emotions is imbalanced and the neuropathways in our brain readily fire toward fear, trauma or fight mode. Positive spectrum emotion can reprogram the brain's neuropathways. Emotional intelligence can be felt *through* our practices to combat the illness of colonization. Healing is an emotional/metaphysical exchange that can be felt and transferred from one carrier of medicine, in this case Madelaine and Metis jigging, to those who need it. This transfer carries on and has big returns.

Madelaine dances for the healing of indigenous people. She does it with love for her heritage, her ancestors, and her people. That makes her practice multi-purposeful. She uses the modeling of her close ancestors and mentors, to empower audience as she dances. She gets to feel great while she dances with pride and skill. She gets empowered when audience members share their feelings back to her. This makes her practice an act of reciprocal love and healing. Madelaine is multi-talented. She practices more than one form of dance, including Pow Wow (jingle dress, and fancy dance) and Hip Hop dancing. This broadens and diversifies her audiences. Pow Wow is an inter-tribal dance celebration, while the Hip Hop dance makes her work current and relevant to indigenous youth. Madelaine's work and practice is a formidable example of the multi-purpose of indigenous performance and the multi-talented leaders in indigenous performance coming into our realities today.

Kinetic movement and channeling of positive feelings that Metis jigging delivers is undeniable. Anyone watching, or in the room, is exposed to the actualization of indigenous love and medicine. When I witness jigging, I want to dance every time. I use dancing as a part on my

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<sup>20</sup> A quick and informative video about how PTSD affects the brain see:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aRRGIYBFEX0>



own program to combat the negative spectrum emotional imbalance caused by historical trauma, and everyday micro-aggressions. Being with the physical part of my being, I join my love for music when I dance. I consciously visualize close loved ones, mostly my sisters, dancing with me to conjure feelings of self-love, reciprocal love and unconditional love. Madelaine's dance is the evocation of unconditional love. Working with Elder's perspectives of her people, Leanne Simpson writes:

Nishnaabe Elder Edna Manitowabi says that one of the reasons our culture and life ways are so important is that our culture brings us great joy. Our culture is beautiful and loving, and it nurtures our hearts and minds in a way that enables us to not just cope, but to live. We always *feel* good after being out in the bush, or after a ceremony. I thought about this that day as I walked. I thought about the word *e-yaa'oyaanh*, which means who I am, the way I am living, or becoming, my identity. In order to have a positive identity we have to be living in ways that illuminate that identity, and that propel us towards *mino bimaadizwain*, the good life. (Simpson, 2011, p. 13).

The unconditional love found within indigenous culture and practices activates the medicine needed to cast off negativity and get back to living the Good Life. Indigenous people use their whole being to express the immensity of knowledge available to them that exists in all of creation. That means we also must use our whole being to return to the Good Life, the inheritance for indigenous living and being in a good way, of well-being.

The holistic nature of indigenous performance can communicate the emotional parts of human being. Indigenous people will continue to heal from past collective and individual traumas. Indigenous-centered performance provides a safe space for this healing work. Indigenous artists in performance such as Madelaine are doing this work of providing spaces of healing for indigenous communities of people. These safe spaces found within indigenous performance can enable neuropathways in the brain to fire towards joy and pride; performance

can condition the brain to reclaim the pathways, towards love and gratitude. Love and gratitude are pathways to healing that provide a protection that is carried in each person affected by this important work. The feeling that our ancestors are proud of us combats the negative spectrum feelings brought by systemic colonization.

## **Chapter 4: Performance Leadership: the Formation of Indigenous**

### **Resurgence Identity**

Today we can appreciate the work of artists who spend much of their time and careers on the empowerment of indigenous people. Their efforts to hone and develop their skills as artist and leaders create positive examples for the youth as well as disenfranchised indigenous people. This healing narrative emerges through the assumption that knowledge dissemination, via stories and oral traditions, endures through current forms of artistic expression.

Performance leaders today are creating content based on indigenous ideas, knowledge, and practice through mediums such as Metis jigging, west coast dance groups, theatre, Hip Hop, and songwriting to name a few. This diversifies and adds to the variety of ways indigenous people overcome assimilation and forced oppression. Our ways no longer live underground. They are now available to all indigenous people. Our leaders emerge as performers engaged in practice and content relevant to indigenous peoples' past, present and future.

#### **4.1 What we Learn in Our Families**

Each artist spoke about family influences within their performance work. It is vital to remember the teachings our families provide. In a sound family, parents, aunties, uncles, cousins and grandparents work hard to provide safe homes for our young people, and good food/nourishment to maximize indigenous peoples potential. They also provide protection from the elements, or forces that could result in our demise.

In *these* homes, we learn how to think about ourselves, each other, and we learn through example and influence. Indigenous performance leaders move us forward in doing the hard work it takes to provide safe homes. Safe homes provide the foundations of our interaction in

the world. When you're out 'in the bush,' or 'back in the sticks,' you protect your brothers and sisters from harm. In this way protection emerges as a source to aid the creation of safety and safe homes. This may also mean being a warrior, either by standing beside and speaking up about what's happening to our people and how that is related to what happened to our ancestors through the colonial project.

#### **4.1.1 Mike Dangeli: "*walking in the light*"**

I'm a combat veteran. Practicing my art saved my life. My grandfather saved my life. My grandmother saved my life because I didn't want to have anything to do with anybody; I was done. I saw some of the most beautiful places on this earth and how ugly we as human beings we treat each other.

I've been doing work with the VPD (Vancouver Police Department) on cultural competency. I've been hassled leaving here: my studio at the [Aboriginal] Friendship Center and fitting a profile because I am an indigenous male. Handcuffed until they could prove there were no warrants for me. I had my medal of valor on and all my ribbons and awards and being sat in the mud because the guy didn't believe I was an Aboriginal veteran. You know, these ugly things. That officer happened to be in one of my classes (on cultural competency). But I still have hope. I have faith.

In the darkest most ugly times in my life there was still that light. One of our biggest beliefs is about walking in the light. There were many times I didn't walk in the light. I've had to fight, crawl...grab onto whatever I could to get into that light. There's a lot of gatekeepers out there. There are a lot of people out there who sabotage.

My grandmother who's just recently passed in the last couple of weeks...I'm reflecting back to a lot of her lessons...it was talking about how people's true colors will always shine through. That Wii Aamligi Laxha,<sup>21</sup> if you continue to have faith in him or her, that you continue to live your life to the best of your abilities. Continue making that noise in a good way [and] that light will shine on them and people will see them for their true colors. And it's hard. But if it were easy everybody would be doing it. True faith isn't true faith unless it's tested. I have faith in Wii Aamligi Laxha. I have faith that the Creator has put us where we're at to be able to do the things that need to happen.

With things that my wife [Mique'l] has to battle on her own (in academia and other colonial institutions), I want to stand in there because I want to protect my wife. It bothers me, those gatekeepers. It bothers me seeing all of our indigenous people having to battle the same crap we've been battling since contact. But I still have faith. I have hope. If I don't, what's the point? There're those slivers of moments of absolute beauty and love that we have for human beings, as human beings. As human beings we can move color and privilege. We can move

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<sup>21</sup> Wii Aamligi Laxha is the Sm'algyax word for the Creator.

beyond the ugliness that has been thrust upon us for so long so...I don't know of any other way of calling it but faith.

So what we do? We get up.

The one thing I learned in the military is we never retreat. I teach this to our sons. We teach it to our dancers. Mique'l and I talk about it constantly. We never retreat. We fall back, we regroup and we attack again. That attack sometimes is through love and kindness. Sometimes it's just sharing a song in a moment that people need to hear it. Sometimes it's in our art and in our performance. That's the only way we can do it that the Creator has taught us by walking in the light. I hope and pray that we can all walk in the light together (Mike Dangeli, personal communication, March 13, 2016).

Mike Dangeli speaks to the legacy and teaching of faith and hope passed on from his grandmother Basaxkw (Louise Dangeli). He speaks to the struggle of remaining positive and hopeful, as well as his struggle to survive harsh colonial realities as an indigenous person. He attributes his survival to his grandparents and his cultural practices: the knowledge, examples, and teachings left to him to pick up and continue and develop further. Sharing his understanding of what "*Walking in the light*," means for a way of living: "that you continue to live your life to the best of your abilities" in answer to life's challenges in order to see one's true colours. Even further than this, to see one's self in a positive way through the reflection of his grandmother and what she taught him. With these intentions of living through the teachings passed and shown to him by Basaxkw and other ancestors, he becomes the embodiment of those teachings and those teachings are protected within his being in the world. These teachings are encoded within his performances and the practices that surround his performing

Indigenous people protect ancestral legacies by ringing in history, remembering and telling ancestral teachings and stories, and relating them to experiences. This kind of protection contributes to safe homes that provide a good space to nurture positive and proud indigenous identity. We are rightfully dignified indigenous nations seeking each other out to grow strength

and beautify. My mom says, “when you see something reaching for the sun, you water it with love and let it grow”.<sup>22</sup> We learn from our family relationships how to nurture and we learn to recognize that nurturing is important for growth and beauty - even survival. Nurturing beauty and affection helps us remember how to feel good about ourselves. Expressions of affection can heal and protect. Protection shows that you value each other’s well being and nurturing brings out the beauty in each other; beauty and affection that already live within us.

#### **4.2 Social Activism Through Performance: “*Calling all Warriors*”**

For many native cultures in North America, the earth itself is considered a female being because of her nurturing us with all we need to survive; like a mother to a child. Yethinihsténha onhwentsya is a significant source of knowledge and healing for indigenous people. Coulthard’s chapter ‘For the Land’ in *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* states:

Indigenous struggles against capital imperialism are best understood as struggles oriented round questions of land- struggles not only for land, but also deeply informed by what the land as a mode of reciprocal relationship (which is itself informed by place-based practices and associated form of knowledge) ought to teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and our surroundings in a respectful, nondominating and nonexploitative way. The ethical framework provided by these place-based practices and associated forms of knowledge is what I call ‘grounded normativity’” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 60).

Within this ‘grounded normativity,’ all the agreements or treaties Indigenous people have already made are fortified and forwarded through a relationship to the Creator and the natural environment. These agreements contextualize the laws that govern all relations for Indigenous

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<sup>22</sup> My mom saw a small plant growing in between the cracks of her house and the walkway near her garden. She didn’t “weed” it; instead she watered it along with the garden. She did this every time she watered her garden. It turned out to be a sunflower plant, but she had not planted sunflowers. She told me this while showing me the picture of the flower; there were nine flowers on this plant, we counted them together. Then she said, “When you see something reaching for the sun, you water it with love and let it grow” (A. Monture, personal communication, June 11, 2017).

people. The agreements govern the relations in the formations of ethics and values. For Coulthard, respect is an ethic that honours the reciprocal relationship Indigenous people have with Yethinihsténha onhwentsya in a ‘nondominating and nonexploitive’ way, is set against ‘capital imperialism.’ So ethics in relation to land is paramount in Indigenous frameworks and Indigenous resurgence.

Leela Gilday states the inception of the song she wrote, “Calling all Warriors” was motivated out of “anger in response to the injustices against her people and the environment” and “to give the new generations an anthem for their work.” This motivation towards resisting injustices affirms her view of a political movement towards restoring justice, as well as revitalization for indigenous love of the earth and environment. Leela talks about the challenging subject matter she engages in her songwriting:

I embrace the things that are difficult to say and I say them in some of my songs. At this stage of decolonization and reconciliation, as a community and in this country, the more truth that comes out the better. It can be spoken once but it needs to be spoken again and again and again, before things start to move forward. I'm not afraid to talk about missing and murdered indigenous women in my work. I'm not afraid to talk about fracking and the impact it has on my territory. It's my role as an artist to reflect that back and to be a leader when it comes to speaking out. Some people find that very empowering and they are really relieved that I'm able to say those things. Maybe they don't feel like they have a platform to speak them. I'm honored to take that platform in my career and say those things. (L. Gilday, personal communication, April 1, 2016).

The intent of our current leaders, such as Leela, represents a formation of resurgence identity, which *acts* on resisting current infections of colonization, such as past and current injustice including the poisoning and destruction of landscapes and eco-systems. These injustices are very difficult to live through, especially when your home territories are being fracked, deforested, flooded, clear-cut, burnt down etc., or when we lose family and loved ones with no answers.

There is an enduring sense of shock and loss that shifts us off our natural healthy balanced way of being. Like indigenous people the earth is enduring violence that does not stop, not even for one day.

#### **4.2.1 Abuse of the Earth is the Abuse of Women**

Another song authored by Leela is a song called “Bella.” Bella is a song about an unsolved death in 2013 of a young and vibrant indigenous woman, Bella Laboucan-McLean (Hong, 2016) and the 1500+ murdered and missing women in Canada. This song speaks truth and stands up for families and communities who are affected by the disappearances and murder of indigenous women in Canada. I asked Leela about her thoughts on the song “Bella,” and motives to write this song:

I was kind of living in a bubble when it came to realizing that one in four native women is going to be harmed or go missing. Those statistics are staggering. I didn't know very much about that until I moved to Vancouver. [That was when I realized] of course this violence against native women is systemic. It's in the fabric of where we came from and what happened to our indigenous territories. It's the same thing. It impacted me in a personal way.

When our dear friend Melina lost [her sister] Bella the RCMP did not do anything. They barely scratched the surface as to what happened to her that night in Toronto. There are still no answers. Because we are close friends I was very affected. It was a really difficult thing for me to realize it happened; to realize what my friend was going through. So I wrote this song in her honor but also because I was really angry. I think that's a natural reaction. The song is not the story of her life; it's what happened afterwards. It expresses the desperate hope that the truth needs to be known. That goes back to what I was saying earlier about how the more you speak the truth; that's the only way working to move forward. That song Bella is one of the most important songs that I've written because I feel like a lot of people can hear it and relate to it and it will help to open their hearts. If you hear a song sung in front of you by somebody who looks like they could be one of the [women affected by violence and murder], that might impact you...It's a story and it makes it relatable where you might have a shift in perspective. I think that's the importance of that song (L. Gilday, personal communication, April 1, 2016).

Like eco-systems and landscapes, our women are disappearing and murdered with little to no justice in sight. Both contain the power of creation within their bodies/physical beings, and



therefore contain the potential and outright necessities for our continuation. Each woman killed in our communities represents the destruction of our potential to continue as a people; the same as our lands and territories. This is a most compelling example of how indigenous people are continuing to recognize how *land* is connected to our present realities. We remain indigenous by recognizing what is sacred and needs protection. We cannot live without women and we cannot live without land. Each landscape annihilated destroys the potential of our current people to continue ways of being that emerge from land and stories. We have endured the loss of our women and lands over many generations. Violence against the earth is allowed by our governments and naturalized by the denial that we need those lands to remain pristine to sustain a healthy environment, to sustain us as healthy people.

Colonization in this context reflects domination, exploitation and harm towards Yethinihsténha onhwentsya and indigenous women. These features are misogynistic in nature. Settler-colonialisms' harmful misogyny is manifested in the many actions, attitudes and behaviors that propagate disrespect for the sacred, or the sacred feminine.

Indigenous territories, women, and Yethinihsténha onhwentsya are not just a *thing* to be dominated, exploited and harmed (through settler-colonialism). Each are entities of indigenous love; they are sources of indigenous love and nurturing. They are the culmination of our love, honoring and integrity and we cannot stand for the destruction of them in any context. When disrespect is shown, or expressed to any of these, the misogynistic characteristic of settler-colonialism shows. Its ingrained into the fabric of the country and the societies we share. All of these histories and stories thus far show the myriad of ways meant to bring native people death. The exploitation and disposal of ecosystems and landscapes (through industrial capitalism) and

women (through Canada's history of the murdered and missing women) are at the demise of all of us, ideologically and physically.

*Denial* is justice incarcerated  
*Erasure* is our women gone missing  
*Assimilation* is brainwashing the masses  
into silence and complicity  
*Exploitation* of the earth  
is the disrespect of its sacredness.  
*Destruction* of indigenous potential  
and the sacred feminine  
is the continuation of Canada's tradition of *genocide*.

Leela's work is a refusal to remain quiet while our indigenous sisters go missing and are murdered without justice. It's a condemnation of the current and historical indigenous femicide and denunciation of current and on-going environmental abuse sanctioned by present-day land colonizers. Indigenous performance in this context forms a part of an empathic movement to heal the people and the lands. It is concerted in a healing process towards justice for indigenous people.

Giving voice to the violence experienced around us and held within us is a pathway to healing. A cry for justice is the sound energy of an intention to heal; an action to release the violence and sound out the wrongness. Its very act is an evocation of the love that still remains through the despair and toil. It voices injustice and anything that disturbs inner and collective peace, that takes us away from the Good Life, shows bravery and courage. Leela Gilday's work is a source of nourishment and healing indigenous people need today. Her anger is a gift; a motivation to act on and transform death and violence to love, protection, and continuity of indigenous people and their ways of being with the land.

#### **4.2.2 Affirmation**

When I use my voice to speak truths too heavy to hear I am invoking love: the accumulation of the many layers of love given and received by the ancestors, and the loved ones that remain with me. I use my voice to speak truth to confirm my protection of loved ones, past and present, against all enemies. In doing so, I reign in peace, growth and the beauty of creation.

## Chapter 5: Legacy and Projecting Indigenous Futures

The production of indigenous knowledge today must be set in the voices of Indigenous people who are actively working towards creating an Indigenous reality that is whole and healthy. Thomas King concludes his book, *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*, by writing, “the fact of Native existence is that we live modern lives informed by traditional values and contemporary realities and that we wish to live those lives on our terms” (King, 2012, p. 266). The relationships between past attempts to destroy Indigenous people, the affects these attempts have on the present and Indigenous peoples’ efforts to look to the future, are stacked simultaneously. The experience of colonization is a part of our histories as indigenous people. Yet, indigenous people have embraced new approaches to knowledge production. Indigenous artists are very interested in imagining our future as different, one that will reflect the Good Life, where no one suffers and everyone gets to eat.

The way Indigenous people talk about, think about, and see themselves in relationship to the world right now is the most important aspect to our survival as people and individuals.<sup>23</sup> Indigenous ways of knowing are not disappearing or becoming less authentic because our experiences through colonization have changed. Indigenous performance has always incorporated forms of knowledge that are dynamic and ingenious. These traits allow continuity, fluidity, and transformation. Re-contextualizing our understanding of our place in relation to Creation, on our own terms, in the present time, can also aid in understanding *ourselves* as a living, acting, and empowered part of Creation. Indigenous performance and presence, is a way

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<sup>23</sup> I include the individual because of the high rates of suicide in our communities. Youth are affected by the ways in which Indigenous people are framed or viewed within the larger Canadian society. Racism and identity degradation leave Indigenous people without positive outlets for being Indigenous in despair.

of expressing current knowledge that engages Indigenous traditions and projects them into the future.

### **5.1 “My People Will Sleep for One Hundred Years”**

Indigenous artists, past and present, have served their communities by utilizing Indigenous knowledge, diversifying or transforming how the knowledge is presented, and making performance a beautiful part of Indigenous cultures. Jeannette Armstrong writes about the role of different people within an Okanogan worldview. Within an Okanogan worldview, people who have inherent attributes or talents, such as a love for the land, learn about land systems and plant medicines to better speak for the land in community discussions and decisions. They lend their voice and advocate on behalf of the land. Armstrong also writes about the artists or ‘creative thinkers’ role in this regard:

There is another group of people in our community who we call the visionaries, the creative people. They are the artists, the writers, and the performers, whose responsibility is to bring their perspective into the community; a perspective that tells everyone that there are innovations, there are creative solutions, and there are new ways we can look at things. We should always make room for newness because we need to be creative when we come up against something that we can’t resolve and that we haven’t come up against before (Armstrong, 2008, pp. 71-72).

Furthermore, Louis Riel (1885) predicted of the Metis that, “My people will sleep for one hundred years, but when they awake, it will be the artists who give them their spirit back.” Again we see the notion of spirit, artistic production, and the metaphysical. Perhaps the notion of spirit, in this context, is simply the sentiment or emotion attached to an empowered sense of being Indigenous. Today, this is accessed through artists understood through this work, as the visionaries.

## 5.2 Showing Leadership: New Innovations

The practice of helping the next generation gain the tools to also become empowered healthy young indigenous people is pitted within an inter-generational ethic. Overcoming issues of poverty and identity dysphonia that impact indigenous youth the most. Our leaders through artistic performance curtail colonial infections on indigenous people today. That makes indigenous performance practices an integral part of the frameworks of survival, continuity, problem solving and resiliency that should be supported and utilized. Ronnie Harris incorporates these concepts within workshops he teaches in Hip Hop:

It's my intention to try and figure things out as I go and leave a contribution behind. When I started having lots of nieces and nephews, I started thinking about that. What does my music actually say? If they're gonna hear this, I don't want them to just hear my problems. 'This is how much it sucked.' I want them to go it was like this but here's how we fixed it. Here's how I'm gonna fix it. Here is how I *want* to fix it. A lot of people just offload their problems. Native problems. Native problems. Native problems. We're stuck in this native victimization narrative that's not medicine. A medicine person doesn't just come in, cry and walk out. A medicine person gives you a solution. 'Okay I feel your pain. Here's what you got to do to fix it.' I find music to be like that. So now I challenge them when we do writing exercises, I do a word cloud with youth.

Word cloud; 'What do you love? Shout it out, shout it out. What makes you mad or sad? Shout it out, shouted it out.' Then we'll write a verse where we look at the things there and make a statement at the top. This is the statement were going to make; "school is hard." Okay great, school is hard. By the end of 16 bars let's try to solve the problem. How are we going to solve the problem of making school not hard? And [I'm] putting that into the framework of how I write or how I teach kids how to write. Because you have to write your own medicine. You can't just point your fingers are problems. That's how I try to tackle it. It's important to try to leave some breadcrumbs, right? I don't just want to leave a bunch of distress signals (R. Harris, personal communication, February 13, 2016).

All of our leaders in indigenous performance involved with this project talked about or embodied the value of education. The value of education and learning exists because each of them acknowledged their role in education by being an educator, becoming educated, acknowledging that they are mentors, or simply sharing what they've learned. One of my mentors, and long time

educator, Jo-ann Archibald taught me how to value indigenous knowledge mobilization; to mobilize indigenous knowledge through the generations. We can only do this through learning and teaching; through the education of our young. Madelaine teaches us how to connect with our spirit through dance. Mike and Mique'l teach us how remembering the stories and researching our ancestors helps us survive as people. They also teach us that partnerships and teamwork is key, and that diversity is beautiful and generative. Mique'l went and did a PhD and is the first and only indigenous person with a PhD in Northwest Coast First Nations Art History after being told "she wasn't collage material." Mike and Ronnie teach us that healing families through close maternal relationships has big returns. Leela acknowledges her role as a mentor and is an important voice for justice. Ronnie teaches us that we can't leave a legacy of problems for the faces yet to come. Thank you to all the leaders and educators for providing a means to survival and flourishment.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion: Reclaiming Territories

Indigenous people need to reclaim, reconnect to, and fight over our *territories* to live the Good Life. We have always known this. Due to the insidious and systematic nature of Canada's settler-colonialism, these territories are no longer limited to lands, landscapes, and ecosystems. The many layers of struggle over indigenous territories are currently fought within all aspects of being. Through examining the subject matter and function of artistic practice today, we include struggles for and over safe social and learning spaces, knowledge systems, and our physical brains as territories needing reclamation.

Reclaiming territories means rejecting the colonial gaze and down casting that exists to question if we have the power to do better for ourselves (through self-determination) than imperial, or Canadian government, or Christian institutions have done by indigenous people thus far. We reclaim territories when we indigenous people are sharing gifts and exercising rights inalienable to our being as people of the land.

Reclaiming territories means a rejection of erasure and interruption narratives. Colonial governments have not erased our connections and endearment for our lands and there have been no interruption of indigenous intentions towards a healthy way of living. Maintaining healthy chemical communication in the brain requires a balance of emotions. This can be challenging in the face of day-to-day and historical aggression towards indigenous people and their territories. Making our way through the consistent stream of multiple losses and dismay is achieved through the creation of safe social and learning spaces.

The creation of safe social and learning spaces means populating these spaces with opportunities to relate with and connect to our indigeneity in a good way, through the evoking of



positive spectrum emotion. Pride and Gratitude. The acts that move us towards indigenous resurgence are the active creation of these opportunities and the collective, or mass participation in these spaces. These spaces require fortified boundaries around what harms us. In this way indigenous performance is a source of protection. Naturalizing our being/beings within our current realities means telling our own narratives as well as being a part of new stories that promote indigenous people's survival. This affirms intent as communities of people, to remain, and continue to identify as indigenous.

Enduring and continuing indigenous values and imperatives that re-emerge in this project are vital and still relevant to indigenous people today. Ancestors and past loved ones that play a role in our counter-narratives against harmful stories are doing their work to support and continue indigenous values and imperatives. Their roles in these stories are an affirmation that we have a voice demonstrated through time. We have the power and ability to endure over time. This is what continuity looks like. The movement towards healing our nations from colonial harms and illnesses reoccur throughout the conversations with the indigenous performance leaders engaged in this project. This is the continued documentation of our challenges and history.

## **6.1 Remaining Values**

The value of reciprocity within our relationships is reflected in the practices and intentions of the many voices included in this work. The valuing of love and family kinship in the production of this new emergence is woven within the fabric of their active theories and practice, their intentions towards indigenous people. The value of giving back to our communities is a response of gratitude towards our past historical struggles and the many generations of ancestors who have struggled against colonial dispossession, harm, dominance,

and exploitation. In this way, indigenous people remain under the protection of our ways of being and our ancestors. In this way, we are propelled towards life supporting legacies for our future. Each artist in this project has deeply considered what that means for them to activate their gifts to create a reality worth living; to create and continue ways of being that sustain a healthy reality. All of these aspects support the eco-system of our sovereignty.

Maintaining love and legacy through periods of grief and despair is extremely difficult. Maintaining values and teachings through spaces of despair and loss is also difficult. Although indigenous people have been living through hard times on individual and collective bases, we are creating the time and space to come back together to feel that love for each other, our cultures, and our collective missions. We do this because we know the importance of legacy and of continuity. We want the earth and our people to continue in a healthy way. They are connected. Our knowledge, communities and the land sustain our living. We cannot turn our backs on our communities and land in exchange for a western way of living simply because its ideologies, practices, and legacy cannot sustain us. Its program was never to sustain us, but to destroy our way of living and our original agreements with land, each other, and the metaphysical.

Performance and artistic expression makes maintaining love, values, and teachings easier. Indigenous artists have nurtured a reciprocal validation process with reciprocal love for community through unconditional love. This work affirms a total rejection of the colonial project and neutralizes the power dynamics in the recognition paradigm. The elimination of this power dynamic is sought through reciprocity, honouring, mutual benefit, and mutual validation that values ancestral knowledge in the now. Indigenous performances is the movement, sound, and energy that supports a living knowledge system and legacy that forwards the value of remaining

indigenous by sharing and nurturing their gifts, by unconditionally giving back to the indigenous community.

Indigenous performance leaders are a part of a system that creates safe spaces by forwarding positive intentions such as justice and healing and new innovations thus actualizing indigenous pride. Indigenous people who have faced such adversity individually and collectively have every right to be proud and grateful to their ancestors for doing this work. These practices, messages, and missions are part of an informal educational and knowledge system that is generating inspiration for the current indigenous generation to engage and be excited about. Indigenous performers are doing the work in our communities to re/story indigenous peoples back to health and nourishment by creating positive indigenous spaces, showing their leadership skills in building their artistic craft, and forwarding values they learned in their families and communities.

By drawing on the work, strength, examples, and values of our ancestors and their legacy, indigenous performance leaders are providing the love, healing, teachings, and innovations needed for an indigenous resurgence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It's already happening. By providing such essentials, indigenous artists are leaders by example of an empathic movement towards an indigenous resurgence. A movement that can sustain *a way of life* that values the land, each other, and descendants, while honouring the lives and work of the indigenous people before us who have kept indigenous ways strong. By using new and western forms of expression to forward and actualize, indigenous values and intentions, indigenous performers are claiming new territories meant to manage new threats and harms to well being. Adaptability is a strength indigenous people have enacted through time. This is the story of the continuation of indigenous

people. This is a story of what's happening now; a story that is set to continue unfold in waves of victory.

Reclaiming territories requires an understanding of the process we are currently in. It means we must understand what sovereignty means for us today. We must look to the strength we have in carrying on; this is a refusal to comply with assimilation. Indigenous spaces of self-determination are a rejection of *erasure* by continuing indigenous values and supporting individual and collective missions. It is the realization that we have leaders, such as performance artists, who consciously reflect on the past and who intend to create spaces where indigenous peoples' potential can continue to grow. Indigenous performance leaders follow the influence and teachings of their families, Elders and loved ones to reject colonization, to affirm collective intentions to be proud indigenous people who work in this mission to provide a good home in which to actualize a healthy form of indigeneity. In these acts the work and knowledge of our ancestors is actualized in the now. Reclaiming territories is the realization that carrying indigenous pride is a permanent fixture in continuing to be dignified indigenous people now and always.

a return to my loving-self  
a gentle kind being  
a loving warm heart  
in wonderment  
and in giving-thanks  
returning  
remembering

I brush you off  
with elders  
with cedars  
I uncover your veil  
so I see you  
clearly again

a clam reasoning  
moving smooth  
and sure  
through and in  
your whole existence

I dust off  
the filth – the film  
with friends  
with family  
so I see you and feel  
your gifts, why you are here

a lifting of fear  
a rejection of false ego  
in honouring  
in trueness  
returning  
remembering

I lift you up  
with integrity  
with strength  
the ancestors  
see you clearly  
lovingly

I see you return  
to your loving-self  
Creation embraces you

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