

**REMEMBERING FORWARD: NAVIGATING THE EVERYDAY OF FORCED
DISPLACEMENT WITH THE CHESLATTA T'EN**

by

Maia Wikler

B.A., Colorado College, 2015

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES
(Anthropology)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)

June 2019

© Maia Wikler, 2019

The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies for acceptance, the dissertation entitled:

Remembering Forward: Navigating the Everyday of Forced Displacement with the Cheslatta T'en

submitted by Maia Wikler in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts

in Anthropology

Examining Committee:

Leslie Robertson

Co-supervisor

Carole Blackburn

Co-supervisor

Supervisory Committee Member

University Examiner

University Examiner

Abstract

Development in British Columbia has and continues to operate within an extractivist, colonial framework with little regard to environmental or community impacts. In 1952, the Cheslatta T'En were forcibly removed from their homelands for Alcan's Kenney Dam. Because of the frequent flooding of Nechako Reservoir, the Cheslatta live in constant tension with a permanently changed landscape as the bones of their ancestors and memories of their way of life continues to wash ashore. The coordinated and intentional efforts of Alcan and the Department of Indian Affairs to remove all material traces of the Cheslatta from their lands had devastating impacts that reach into their ancestral past, continue in the present, and shape Cheslatta's collective action for a more just future. The Cheslatta's memories of their lands and forced displacement are the traces that Alcan and the settler state could not erase.

Today, with approximately 140 band members resettled onto eleven different reserves, totaling 1,400 hectares and scattered over 170 miles apart, the Cheslatta navigate resettlement and efforts to reclaim their heritage in a land and space disconnected from what had been their homelands for thousands of years. Through an ethnohistorical and ethnographic analysis, I investigate the following: How are acts of resistance to displacement and dispossession informed by cultural meanings and memories of the land? What are the everyday experiences of dispossession and displacement? How do community members navigate "moving forward"? In this thesis, I analyze the individually narrated experiences of displacement; observations of reconciliation negotiations; community gatherings; Cheslatta community members' interactions with the landscape; and, archival documents. My analysis coincides with theoretical frameworks of memory, space and place, and settler state reconciliation politics.

Lay Summary

Indigenous scholars Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua write, “We also need a better understanding of the ways in which Aboriginal peoples resist ongoing colonization [...] Within antiracism theory and practice, the question of land as a contested space is seldom taken up,” (Lawrence & Dua 2005: 126). I hope this work will contribute to studies concerned with ways that identity, land and memory inform contexts of on-going engagement with colonial processes of displacement and how destruction by way of displacement and altered landscapes is not a complete annihilation of a community but an opportunity for the community to remake the world.

Preface

This thesis is an original intellectual product of the author, Maia Wikler. The fieldwork reported throughout this thesis was covered by UBC Ethics Certificate number H17-01090.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Lay Summary	iv
Preface.....	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Figures.....	vii
List of Abbreviations	viii
Acknowledgements	ix
Dedication	x
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Theoretical Frameworks	4
1.2 Methodology	6
1.3 Thesis Structure	9
Chapter 2: Historical Context.....	10
Chapter 3: Aerial Parallels and the Everyday	21
3. 1 The Campout.....	31
3. 2 Moving Forward	41
Chapter 4: Conclusion.....	50
Bibliography	52

List of Figures

Figure 1.1 The hilltops or provincial “islands.” Photo by Author	23
Figure 2.1 Driftwood from the flood, flooded forest. Photo by Author	24

List of Abbreviations

BC British Columbia

Acknowledgements

This research would not have been possible without the Cheslatta community. I am forever grateful for the incredible warmth and hospitality I received while in the field. From berry picking with Chief Corrina's granddaughter, the long, hilarious drives on logging roads with Jessi Jack and Jeff Likkell, visiting the trapper's cabin with Kris Peters, making moose meat burgers with Minnie and Ava Peters, the full moon kayak paddle on Mollice Lake with Anastasia Troy, walking the Cheslatta Trail with Gussie Leween, driving around the beautiful country with James Rakochy and learning about incredible stories of resistance from Mike Robertson, Ted Jack's humor, Virginia Gagnon's incredible kindness and visiting Daniel Troy on the barge. These are memories I cherish.

I am forever grateful to Janice Babytch, for her care after my car accident and opening her home for me to stay in, especially for the snowshoeing adventures following moose tracks.

I am incredibly grateful for the inspiring leadership of Chief Corrina and her support of my work in the community, thank you for trusting me with this work. I have learned so much about perseverance, tenacity and integrity from you.

Special thanks especially to my advisors, Dr. Carole Blackburn and Dr. Leslie Robertson, both of whom were endlessly supportive and patient as I navigated my recovery and encouraged me to balance important work and health. I feel I became a better researcher, engaged community member and academic because of both their work and insights on my thesis. I am incredibly grateful to Dr. Wade Davis for his unwavering support and believing in this project. I am forever grateful to you all for providing incredible mentorship, sharing invaluable insights and feedback, while encouraging me to face research challenges.

Finally, to my loving and supportive friends and family, who were constantly there for me throughout this entire experience: my parents, Alexandra, Neva, Gaby, Mary, Maddie, Vanessa, Pujie, Clem, Hamoody, Nayeli & Madeline.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated entirely to the Cheslatta t'en community.

Chapter 1: Introduction

For 10,000 years, the Nechako River Valley has been home to the Cheslatta t'en, a Dakelh community in Central Interior British Columbia, Canada.¹ In 1952, the Cheslatta t'en were forcibly removed from their ancestral, unceded territory by the flooding from the dams built for Alcan's Kemano aluminum smelter project in Kitimat, British Columbia (Windsor & Mcvey 2005: 165). Alcan's aluminum smelter required the construction of the Kenney Dam in 1951, which was then the largest rock-filled dam in North America, along with nine smaller dams that inundated a chain of lakes and rivers. One of those smaller dams, the Murray Lake Dam, flooded out the Cheslatta villages and community. In 1952, with less than two weeks' notice and waters already rising, the Department of Indian Affairs and Alcan officials forced the Cheslatta into a 50 km exodus to Grassy Plains in treacherous conditions of winter thaw (Robertson 1992). The completion of the Murray Lake Dam flooded burial sites and washed away coffins and spiritual markers. The Cheslatta t'en storied the landscape with the collective memory of displacement, which continues to inform the everyday experience of resettlement for Cheslatta band members today. Impacts of the coordinated and intentional efforts of Alcan and the Department of Indian Affairs to remove Cheslatta from their lands have consequences that reach into their ancestral past, continue in the present, and shape their collective action for a more just future. The Cheslatta people's memory of their lands and their forced displacement are traces that Alcan and the settler state did not erase.

The Cheslatta community were resettled on eleven different reserves totaling 1,400 hectares scattered over 170 miles, just south of Francois Lake, B.C, where approximately 140 people, (40%) of the band members live today. Chief Corrina Leween said at a meeting in the band office, "all territory Cheslatta live on is Wet'suwet'en, so our healing involves the land, to get people back home this is why we need a cold-water release."² There isn't one Cheslatta living

¹ Dakelh, means '*people who travel by water*'

² As part of the 1997 Agreement with the British Columbia provincial government, Alcan committed up to \$50 million toward the design and construction of a Cold Water Release Facility (CWRF) at the Kenney Dam for the environmental enhancement of the Nechako River. This project is supposed to address damage caused in local rivers by restoring water flows in the Nechako River. The damage results from large volumes of water forced downstream which impacts spawning sockeye and rare white sturgeon beds. The annual flooding from the Kenny Dam reservoir also inundates Cheslatta's graveyards, washing away coffins, resulting in human remains being dispersed along the shores of Cheslatta Lake.

on Cheslatta territory. Now, the individual parcels allows that disconnect and this new generation has gotten used to that distance” (Field Notes, February 2018). Today, the reservoir is a somber sight of grey from water to land. The drowned tree tops, spires of grey, and waterlogged driftwood blend into the ashen pine forests along the shoreline, dead from the pine beetle epidemic. Active osprey nests are perched on rotting tree tops, just inches above the water’s surface (Field Notes, June 2017). The effects of the forced dislocation of the Cheslatta are expressed by community members in interviews and band meetings focused on ways the community can heal and move forward. Without a cold-water release system, reservoir flows remain unpredictable and may suddenly flood Cheslatta’s remaining burial sites, their lands and trails. Despite the 1997 settlement agreement between Alcan and the province of BC that resulted in a \$50 million commitment to build a cold-water release facility, both parties have failed to uphold the settlement agreement and to this day there is no cold-water release facility (Larsen & Johnson 2017: 37).

In 2008, Chief Corrina Leween published an open letter to the editor and people of the Nechako Watershed in the *Omineca Express* regarding the Kenney Dam Release Facility:

“I write this letter out of sheer frustration and mounting anxiety over the long outstanding issue of a water release facility at the Kenney Dam [...] We have worked closely with Alcan developing a business relationship, including a land and resource management plan where the KDRF plays a central role in Cheslatta's full participation. Is all of this work for naught? Alcan is committed to match up to \$50 million as per the 1997 Settlement Agreement [...] Will Ottawa ever step up to the plate and invest in a watershed they helped devastate? Can they not see the incredible return on their investment in terms of river management, environmental restoration and actual positive revenue returns? Speaking of paying the price, the Cheslatta People have paid the highest price possible going on 56 years now. We have seen our ancestors wash away. We've witnessed our villages burnt to ashes. Cheslatta children, who could have been our Elders today, are buried in graveyards far from Cheslatta Lake and mourned by no one. Forgotten. We struggle daily, trying not to relive the past, by living each day working to build and sustain a strong healthy community. We have had failures and some victories but we cannot be successful unless we have a future. That positive future is contingent on a release facility at the Kenney Dam. Yes, we have been victims, but now we are part of the solution if all responsible parties come to the table. The time is now for B.C. and Ottawa to ante up their share and bring stability back to the Nechako River and the Cheslatta Lake and River system. Help us - quit hurting us. you've taken our river and given us mud. You've taken our children and given us headstones. You've taken our caribou and given us welfare. You've taken our water and given us death. We want no pity, we just want what's right.”

(Chief Corrina Leween, *Omineca Express*, 2008).

As recently as 2015, the Cheslatta people gathered at the Cheslatta Lake shoreline to collect the bones of their ancestors that washed ashore because of uncontrolled flows in the absence of a proper water release facility. “Each year the members of our nation re-live that devastation of knowing their ancestors are somewhere out in the lake,” said Chief Corrina Leween at the gathering (Nienow, *Burns Lake District News* 2015).

Canada proclaims to be in an “era of reconciliation” and celebrated its 150th anniversary as a state in 2017, the year I first visited Cheslatta (Morgan & Castleden 2018). Currently, the Cheslatta are involved in a formal reconciliation negotiation with the province and with Alcan that began in 2016. They are currently in final stages of negotiations, as of March 2019. According to the 2016 Framework, “the negotiation between Cheslatta and BC is intended to achieve the Reconciliation and Settlement Agreement that addresses impacts of the Nechako reservoir on Cheslatta asserted aboriginal rights and title interests and contributes to broader reconciliation between the Parties” (2016 Framework for Negotiation of the Reconciliation and Settlement Agreement between Cheslatta and BC). The reconciliation negotiation meetings I was invited to witness were strictly confidential and required non-disclosure agreements.³ Therefore, all information in this thesis regarding Cheslatta’s negotiations includes only material made public. I am careful to respect the confidentiality of ongoing work amongst the Cheslatta community, band office, and Chief and Council as they seek the justice and resolution they deserve.

Through an ethnohistorical and ethnographic account of the Cheslatta’s historical removal from their ancestral territory in the Nechako River region in British Columbia, I investigate the following: How are acts of resistance to displacement and dispossession informed by cultural meanings and memories of the land? What are the everyday experiences of dispossession and displacement? How do community members navigate “moving forward”? In this thesis, I analyze the individually narrated experiences of displacement; observations of reconciliation negotiations; community gatherings; Cheslatta community members’ interactions with the landscape; and, archival documents. My analysis coincides with theoretical frameworks

of memory, space and place, and settler state reconciliation politics (Gordillo 2014; Assmann, et.al 1995; Halbwachs 1992; Coulthard 2014; Simpson 2017; Riano-Alcala 2000). Theoretically, this thesis is informed by analyses of settler colonialism, as it is comprised of processes and actions as described in this thesis. Settler colonialism is not an event or moment in history, it is an enduring set of structures and processes that operate within a contemporary neoliberal framework normalized in environmental racism, oppression and violence, resource extraction projects, land exploitation and privatization, and capitalism that is legitimated by western knowledge systems (Arvin et. al 2013; Bonds & Inwood 2016; Preston 2013; Wolfe 2006). Recognizing and naming forms of settler colonialism not only historically but as part of an ongoing process is necessary for any form of reconciliation (Preston 2013; Cornthassel et. al 2009).

1.1 Theoretical Frameworks

I argue that displacement must be discussed alongside critical conversations about colonialism and “extractivism” (Willow 2016). Anna Willow writes that “extractivism” is both principle and practice, rooted in the central fiction “that nature is limitless” and therefore capitalistic industries are relentless in the quest to obtain natural resources (2016: 2). In Canada’s “extractivist” frontier, homelands become wastelands through “formative acts of violent dispossession [that] set the stage for capitalist accumulation by tearing Indigenous societies from the source of their livelihood, the land” (Coulthard 2014: 7). Canada’s ongoing extractivist colonialism, is a form of structural violence that is pervasive and functions as “state control over an area of land and the Indigenous populations and resources within it” (Irlbacher-Fox 2014: 151; Willow 2016: 46). British Columbia’s history is wrought with resource exploitation and extraction that continues today (Peyton 2017; Bowles & Veltmeyer 2014; Temper 2019). As Leanne Simpson writes, “Extraction and assimilation go together. Colonialism and capitalism are based on extracting and assimilating” (2014:75). The Cheslatta experienced the extractivist process of the settler state stealing land and resources without consent; thus, these frameworks are essential through which to understand prevailing circumstances that enabled their displacement and inform ongoing engagements with both Alcan and the province for resolution and reconciliation.

My analysis of the everyday, ongoing experiences of displacement draws from Richard Nixon's theory of slow violence as it recognizes violence that often goes unseen because it does not fit into state-enforced categories which are usually based on an event "immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, erupting into instant sensational visibility" (2013: 2). Nixon calls for a reconceptualization of the assumptive, colonial nature in which we perceive and respond to violence. Slow violence accounts for temporal dispersion that is exponential and typically caused by "corrosive transnational forces" (Nixon 2013: 5). The slow violence perpetrated by BC and Alcan through Cheslatta's displacement defies bounded notions of time and space. The slow violence of the forced displacement and extractivism is evident in the ongoing impacts that the Cheslatta band members continue to navigate. Anthony Oliver-Smith writes, "Development-forced resettlement is in many ways the ultimate expression of a state's monopoly of the management of violence" to exert control over the land and people within the territory (Oliver-Smith: 2010: 14). The magnitude and expedience of violence Alcan committed in 1952 with the Kemano Project extends into the present with both Alcan and the province's refusal to relinquish water and land rights back to the Cheslatta. This exertion of control over land and people most impacted is a continuation of Alcan and BC's management of violence, a form of slow violence. By referring to Cheslatta's displacement as a singular, finalized event that occurred in 1952, BC and Alcan simplify and minimize long-term impacts. This is an implied, and sometimes overt, sentiment expressed in both BC and Alcan's engagement in reconciliation negotiations with the Cheslatta.

Accounts that portray Cheslatta's forced displacement as an atrocity relegated to the past fail to recognize ongoing impacts. Scholars, J.E. Windsor and J.A. McVey outline the devastating impact of displacement but their characterization perpetuates this notion of destructive permanence: "In the case of the Cheslatta community, death by drowning is rapid, complete and for all intents and purposes irreversible. Homes, fields and roads are no longer there, the entire landscape has been obliterated. Even where the reservoir, in some future scenario, were to be drained, no landmarks, no cherished reminders of home would remain visible under a few to several meters of sediment" (2005 :156).

Since their displacement, the Cheslatta continue to construct a narrative about the past that is connected to the future, a way of "remembering forward" (James 2010). Memory is a

perpetually active phenomenon that can be traced in and through specific sites as it adheres to spaces, objects, gestures and images (Ben-Amos 1999). Collective memory or collective remembering is an ongoing, active process of construction and reconstruction in time that also takes shape through acts of commemoration. Jeffrey Olick argues that each differing form of memory is important whether it is public, private, reminiscence or commemoration, personal testimonial or national narrative—because the past makes the present (2007: 34). Collective memory and commemoration is a way of claiming that the past has something to offer in the present, that the past can provide a reference for identity and action (Olick 2007: 55). The Cheslatta have utilized memory and reclamation of spaces and “ruin” to assert their agency and history amid ongoing colonial attempts at erasure (Gordillo 2014). For example, Cheslatta Lake was ceremonially consecrated as an official Catholic cemetery in 1993. Cheslatta organized an annual 5-day Campout on the shores of Cheslatta Lake in 1998 and Cheslatta elders testified in a Specific Land Claims case from the collective memory of what was stolen.

1.2 Methodology

I drew methodological insights from Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, Leanne Simpson and her recent work, *As We Have Always Done* (2017). Simpson encourages a methodology within an ethical framework that emphasizes doing or making, relationships, visiting, observing, reflecting and mentoring as ways of generating knowledge (2017: 57). On visiting, Simpson writes, “visiting is lateral sharing in the absence of coercion and hierarchy, and in the presence of compassion” (Ibid: 18). Meaning is derived from relationships, which contextualizes knowledge (ibid:I don’t think you need the spaces after the colon156). These principles fundamentally informed my methodology as well as Christopher Gall’s emphasis that the needs of the community should be prioritized over research objectives and timelines (Gall & Hoffman 2011). I visited, observed, reflected, interviewed, listened, shared and actively participated in the community whenever possible and appropriate for a total of three and a half months.

My thesis work was forged independently without preexisting contacts, thus my first introduction to the Cheslatta was through an email response to my letter of introduction to the Chief and Council from Mike Robertson, a non-Indigenous man who has been employed by the band office for over 20 years and currently serves as Senior Advisor to the Chief and Council.

Mike wrote that the Chief and Council would be at the Vancouver Airport and could meet with me to determine if the research would be a good fit for the community. With little notice, I was on the Skytrain rushing to the airport. After an hour discussing the research, my intentions and background, along with Cheslatta's interests and needs, Mike turned to me and asked, "How soon can you be out here?" After a few weeks, I received an invitation from the Chief and Council to carry out my research with the community and immediately booked my flight to Prince George for early summer. This was the first of three visits to Cheslatta.⁴

During my first month in the field I focused on acquiring a sense of place and building relationships with the community. This meant that I prioritized being present for the community and doing whatever was asked of me, whether that was giving an elder a car ride when requested or watering the greenhouse. Upon arriving at Cheslatta, I was asked to help the band office organize, host and coordinate filmmakers' visits to the Campout, an annual 5-day return to Cheslatta's traditional territory on the shores of Cheslatta Lake. Within the first two weeks at Cheslatta, I organized a community breakfast to introduce my research to the community and offer clarity about what I was doing there and why. This also created a space for feedback. My first month was a whirlwind that began with an aerial helicopter tour of impact sites with Alcan officials. We attended a two-day, First Nations Major Projects Coalition meeting in Prince George with Chief and Council; travelled to Vanderhoof for Rio Tinto's meeting on emergency preparedness for floods; sat in on reconciliation negotiation meetings among the province, Alcan and Cheslatta; and, took long drives out into what Cheslatta band members and Southsiders refer to as, "the bush" where I visited Cheslatta's forestry mill and barge. Throughout my interactions with Alcan, I made my role as a researcher clear, explicitly informing them about my research focus on the impacts of Cheslatta's forced displacement from their operations.

After the Campout and four weeks at Cheslatta, I felt it was more appropriate to begin interviewing Cheslatta members I had come to know. Throughout the interview process, I strove for a non-hierarchical approach that avoided a prescribed format and instead created space for an exchange of knowledge and questions (Smith 1992: 6). In selecting quotes and sentiments expressed in interviews and from my field notes, I opt for a "speaker-centered" approach to

⁴ The Cheslatta band office and several reserves are currently located in Southside, BC, on the Southbank of Francois Lake, this area is also referred to as "Cheslatta" by the members of the Cheslatta community.

highlight what is important to the speaker given their emphases and expressed desires (Ibid: 12). There are only a few remaining elders in Cheslatta who remember the displacement in first-hand accounts. Therefore, I relied primarily on archival interviews from the Cheslatta Band Office Archives for direct accounts of those who had first-hand experiences of the 1952 displacement. Given the subject matter and my own time constraints, the archived interviews of elders are important sources that the Cheslatta band office shared with me. I accessed these interviews in Cheslatta's archive building with the assistance of Jared Johnson, a band office employee who manages the archives. The archive building is a fireproof, climate-controlled trailer located behind the band office that houses various documents such as land use maps, recorded interviews, legal documents and so forth. Working with these archives brought voices of the past into the present.

Unfortunately, at the end of the fourth week in mid-July, all research came to a stop after I survived a near-fatal car accident. Despite needing time to heal from the accident, being on the land with various community members was invaluable during this period. I returned to Cheslatta for a second visit in February, but the night I arrived the community was hit by a severe snowstorm. With only two weeks for a visit, and the community completely snowed in for most of that period, time was once again a constraint. During those two weeks, I cooked up several breakfasts at the band office, interviewed two additional Cheslatta community members, attended a community wellness day event at Francois Lake, as well as ongoing negotiation meetings in Burns Lake. During my third visit in April, the Chief and Council along with band office employees were consumed with ongoing Reconciliation negotiations and the Cheslatta community was mourning the loss of an elder. I spent most of my visit with elders and attended several workshops on trapping organized by the band office as a part of their wellness programming. Extreme weather, deaths and other stressful circumstances limited the number of interviews and kinds of questions I asked in the field.

Building trust was critical, especially as the research involved sensitive topics. However, trust and relationship building takes time which is inherently challenged in short-term research projects. Embracing a relationship-focused approach to my interviews and connection to the Cheslatta community members required more time than I initially anticipated. The reward of this approach is a deeper perspective of how the Cheslatta view their history and future. Thus, this

thesis is a culmination of interviews and experiences with several Cheslatta band members and band council members and does not represent the entirety of the Cheslatta community.

1.3 Thesis Structure

In *Chapter 2: Historical Context*, I integrate a critical analysis of the history of Cheslatta's displacement with archived interviews of elders, communication between the DIA and Alcan, and a public discourse analysis of prominent media sources at the time of Alcan's developments. *Chapter 3: Aerial Parallels and the Every Day*, transitions into what displacement looks like on the ground sixty-six years later and how the Cheslatta community members I worked with experience and navigate ongoing impacts. Section 3.1, "The Campout," focuses on themes of collective memory, reclamation of space and place, and social repair through an analysis of Cheslatta's annual 5-day event where the community returns to Cheslatta Lake. Section 3.2, "Moving Forward," focuses on the complexity of Cheslatta's efforts to "move forward," through community building and participation in two different negotiation tables with BC and Alcan. *Chapter: 4 Conclusion*, I critique the context of ongoing settler colonialism in BC and Alcan's approach to their settlement agreements with Cheslatta and how this hinders meaningful reconciliation.

Chapter 2: Historical Context

The Second World War created a surge in demand for aluminum and changed the profile of hydro-electricity in Canada, driving expansion and increasing Canada's power generating capacity by 40% between 1939 and 1945. The force of rapid wartime development along with nationalist politics reinforced the rationale that hydroelectric projects must expand, or Canada's war production would be compromised (Evenden 2015: 191). Numerous media outlets depicted rivers as natural allies in Canada's war effort. Newsprint headlines read, "A River Fights a War," and "the River's song today is 'Action!'" (Ibid: 66-67). Aluminum was pursued relentlessly by Canadian officials who viewed it as one of Canada's crucial wartime contributions; thus, Alcan was ensured priority access to power and governmental support (Ibid: 193). In an economy of war, a political environment of nationalism and Western ideology, Canada established the private company, Alcan, as a key player in the aluminum market. Following the war, British Columbia fast-tracked industrial development in rural areas by courting large corporations with the promise of lucrative resource development in what was imagined as the vast wilderness and exceptionally generous licenses, leases and a taxation system that privileged corporate interests (Windsor & Mcvey 2005: 151). This pervasive paternalistic, colonial ideology enabled a political elite to impose mega development projects, veiled in the justification of modernity and economic growth, while preventing input from local populations impacted by such developments.

In 1948, during the height of Canada's hydro-nationalism, the BC provincial government invited Alcan officials on a helicopter tour over the Nechako River, homeland of the Cheslatta T'en, to survey the lands for a site to produce hydroelectric power for Alcan's aluminum smelter (Windsor & Mcvey 2005: 152). This imperialistic aerial ascent minimized life on the ground, the homelands of the Cheslatta. When Rob Nixon asks, "Who gets to see and from where?" he refers to privileged perspectives wherein unseen, non-settler lives elude the senses of those in positions of power (2013: 15). The fateful helicopter ride demonstrated an abstraction of space, necessary for extractivism and a capitalistic transformation of the river. It made invisible the extensive traplines running from Uncha Lake to Tahtsa Lake as far south as the Ulkatcho territory; the villages and clay stoves along the shores of the Cheslatta Lake and Murray Lakes. Without consent or consultation with the Cheslatta community, in 1950 the province signed over rights to

the entire Nechako River to Alcan, along with timber, mineral and land rights for an annual license fee of \$5 (Windsor & Mcvey 2005: 146).⁵

The government, media, and Alcan reduced the homelands of the Cheslatta to resources to be commodified. Journalistic reports perpetuated Western colonial ideologies that erased Indigenous communities on the frontlines of the province's extractivism agenda; the entire volume of the 1954 *Engineering Journal* detailed the Kemano Project without a single mention of the displacement of the Cheslatta people. A journalist for *Harper's Magazine* described Alcan's dam in grandiose sentiments, "it exists simply to turn the flow of one of the great watersheds of Canada and, far off, to divert this water down a drop sixteen times higher than Niagara Falls" (Neuberger 1953). *Nation's Business* described Alcan as being "a major factor in the growing industrialization of western Canada" and reported that Alcan engineers "literally hacked a way through a wilderness" (1955). "Wilderness" is a term and concept commonly used to describe the lands of northern British Columbia to promote western colonialism. Brenda Guernsey writes, "the western colonial ideologies embedded in this interpretation of the land had the effect of dehumanizing and erasing an extant vibrant Aboriginal landscape during the process of colonization. This re-writing of the landscape was accomplished through various colonial mechanisms" (Guernsey 2009: ii). Alcan's Paul Clark boasted that the Kenney Dam's life will be "measured in geological, not historical time" (Christensen 1995: 12). *National Geographic's* David Boyer described it as "the most expensive project ever attempted by private industry [...]" First of all, the Nechako River flowed the wrong way. Its headstreams tumbled out of mile-high mountains—glacier-ridden ranges backed up against the sea. Icy runoff waters swept inland, through sprawling lakes into the Nechako, down the mighty Fraser [...] To prevent this waste of power, Alcan built Kenney Dam, controlling an upper Nechako drainage area as large as Connecticut plus half of Rhode Island" (1956). In a *Globe and Mail* article titled, "Centuries Old Nechako River Erased to Aid B.C. Aluminum," it was reported that "with one final stroke man has erased the Nechako River from the landscape of Northern British Columbia" (1952). Alcan's aluminum smelter and Kenney Dam were the ultimate colonial dream of a conquered wilderness by the force of men and a massive capitalistic venture into modernity.

⁵ This was the license fee for the Cheslatta system only. Alcan would later be granted a permanent license in 1999 (Wellington et al. 1997: 138).

Alcan's mega development was already another layer in a long history of colonial impositions on the lands and waters of the region. The Western colonial ideology was also evident through the imperial act of renaming the land with anglicized, appropriated place names (Lawrence 2004). Nechako, the river's Anglicized name, mimics the local Indigenous name for it: "Incha-Khoh," which means "Big River" (Christensen 1995: 77). Additionally, the planned town created by Alcan for the aluminum smelter operations was called Kitimat.⁶ The aluminum smelter and dam construction project is referred to as the "Kemano project". The 1955 issue of *Nation's Business* reported that Kemano was the name for an "old tribe of nomadic Indians whom once roamed the pleasant Kemano Valley."

Before Alcan's Kemano Project and Kenney Dam, the Murray and Cheslatta Lakes formed a central homeland to the Cheslatta T'en situated on 16 reserves throughout Cheslatta territory.⁷ The water and lands provided the cohesion of culture, food and livelihood. "We lived on our hunting and trapping," Elder Mary Skins recalled (Mary Skins, Interviewed by Mike Robertson, 1984, Cheslatta Archives Southside, BC). Elders Camille Joseph and Abel Peters spoke about the traplines as their education, the places where Cheslatta learned respect for the land and ancestral teachings while working the traplines with their parents and grandparents (Interviewed by Mike Robertson, 1984, Cheslatta Archives Southbank, BC). Elder Mary Quaw recounted, "we fished for char, trout, whitefish, ling, cod and minnows in these places all our lives." (Mary Quaw, Interviewed by Mike Robertson, 1984, Cheslatta Archives Southside, BC) The Cheslatta's relationship to the land and sense of place was grounded in the practice of the *keyah*. *Keyah* for the Cheslatta means "within the feet," and the literal translation is "the area in which one walks" (Larsen et al. 2017: 28). The *keyah* was a relational way of thinking grounded in place. Soren Larsen writes, "prior to the 1952 relocation, Cheslatta places were known from 'within the feet,' [...] land was walked into being" (Ibid: 26). The spatial concept of territoriality

⁶ The 1953 *Harper's Magazine*, Richard Neuberger wrote "...Kitimat, a name taken from a tiny village of 350 isolated souls on an inlet of the Pacific Ocean [...] the mammoth size undertaking makes the project a unique symbol of the vast industrial boom that nowadays is tapping the resources of the Canadian wilderness."

⁷ Reserves were laid out in 1916 by the McKenna-McBride Commission. "Heads of Cheslatta families applied for land allotments which were classified as reserves. The Cheslatta had their designated villages before the Commission classified the land as reserve. The Cheslatta reserves were spread out along Cheslatta Lake with a series of trails connecting them and linking reserves to hunting, trapping and fishing grounds" (Buhler 1998: 40).

also referred to family hunting areas occupied through habitual and symbolic forms of walking; families demonstrated occupation of hunting grounds and traplines by walking their lands (Larsen 2003: 76). The keyah supported relationships to the land through a system of place names and oral histories that connect past, present and future generations (Larsen et al. 2017: 27).

While Cheslatta villages hummed with life on the shores of the Murray and Cheslatta Lakes, government and Alcan officials hastily negotiated the process of removal and resettlement of the Cheslatta. Documents show that, at a ministerial level, the federal government would not allow the relocation of the Cheslatta to be an “obstacle” to the project (Dawson 2002: 154). Further, the Minister of Fisheries urged officials to make a decision regarding the Cheslatta’s surrender and displacement in a matter of hours rather than weeks. The Minister of Fisheries was concerned about the impacts of the Nechako reservoir upon the salmon. The BC government and Alcan brokered a deal with the Minister of Fisheries to water the Nechako just enough to sustain salmon runs, yet this required an additional dam on Murray Lake. On March 28, 1952 the Minister of Fisheries, R. W Mayhew wrote from Ottawa to the DIA,

“I regret the necessity of having to draw your attention to the urgency of this matter rather than to negotiate over a long period. Unfortunately, rather than unique conditions of climate in producing an early break-up, has raised difficulties. Actually, success appears now to depend on decisions being reached in a matter of hours, or a day or two, rather than in a matter of weeks. It would be appreciated if you could co-operate with me to the extent of asking your offices to give the matter the highest priority in order to speedily finalize the negotiations”

(1952 Telegrams compiled by Mike Robertson, Cheslatta Archives
Southside, BC)

The following day on March 29, 1952, R. Howe, Indian Superintendent in Vanderhoof, B.C., wrote to the Kenney Dam project manager:

“I have been instructed by my department to proceed to Cheslatta Lake and arrange for the evacuation of the Indian settlers around the lake at the earliest possible date.”

(1952 Telegrams compiled by Mike Robertson, Cheslatta Archives
Southbank, BC)

Leading up to the relocation, correspondence with the local Department of Indian Affairs agents, Howe and W.S. Arneil, demonstrated knowledge of the serious impacts the flooding would have upon the Cheslatta. Superintendent L.L. Brown of Reserves and Trusts in Ottawa wrote to Arneil

and Howe that the removal of the Cheslatta from their lands would result in a “complete change for this group of Indians” (Dawson 2002: 233). Willow (2016: 3) defines a “sacrifice zone” as lands deemed by government and industry exploitable for the promise of modernity and economic expansion. Cheslatta homelands became a “sacrifice zone” as the ideology of capitalism and colonialism legitimated their displacement and degradation of their social and material worlds.

Forced Relocation: The following is the story of the displacement from the Cheslatta Archives

Just days before waters began to rise, a meeting was arranged by DIA officials at the villages on April 3, 1952, to notify the Cheslatta of the impending flood and their forced displacement. With less than two weeks’ notice, DIA officials, who were flown into the Cheslatta reserves on an Alcan aircraft, arrived at the Cheslatta villages to inform the community members of the impending flood. Many of the Cheslatta were away working on their trap lines; only fifteen Cheslatta people were present. The DIA representatives demanded that Cheslatta surrender their lands without protest; the Cheslatta refused. Despite their refusal, the DIA scheduled their “surrender meeting” for April 16, just 13 days after informing the Cheslatta of the construction of the dam.⁸ Meanwhile, on April 8, the waters began to rise as Alcan completed construction of the Murray Lake Dam. The license to dam Murray Lake was issued four months *after* its completion (Robertson 1992, Cheslatta Archives Southside, BC). The region was in a winter thaw the day of the surrender meeting on April 16, 1952. According to Mike Robertson’s report of the 1952 flood published by the band office, large sheets of ice were beginning to break on Cheslatta Lake while icy, mud-slick roads and trails were nearly impassable (Robertson 1992, Cheslatta Archives Southside, BC).

The local Indian Affairs agent Arneil wrote to Ottawa that the winter conditions made it “practically impossible for the Indians on No. 5 and No. 7 Reserves to move their belongings to Ootsa or Grassy Plains by team sleigh and wagons under the present conditions (Dawson 2002:

⁸ For a land surrender, the Indian Act requires a majority of band members vote and that the surrender is approved by a majority. Surrender documents must be signed by elected chief and councilors. On the day of the “surrender” Indian affairs agent, Howe, appointed the Chief and Councillors at the time of the meeting, they had not been elected by the band. For full discussion on legality of the Cheslatta’s “surrender” see Dick Byl’s *Analysis of the Cheslatta Surrender* (1992).

218). Local Vanderhoof DIA official, Howe, received a telegram from Alcan Project Manager, E.A Clark stating:

“Apparently little hay in camp. Their transportation now problem as ice hazardous. Helicopter snowbound Tahtsa but will leave as soon as possible. Ice on Cheslatta prohibits getting in by boat.”

(1952 Telegrams compiled by Mike Robertson, Cheslatta Archives Southside, BC)

Cheslatta members who could make the arduous journey were assembled at Bel-ga-tse for what, unbeknownst to them, would be a final surrender meeting (Robertson 1992, Cheslatta Archives Southside, BC). Other community members, still out on their traplines, were completely unaware of the crisis unfolding at their home. Not a single DIA or Alcan official showed up at the meeting. Days passed, and food supplies dwindled as buildings were submerged under rising waters. On April 20th, Alcan and DIA officials arrived by helicopter to start the delayed surrender meeting, documents in hand. Abel Peters, the only Cheslatta member present who could speak English because of his experience as a war veteran, presented the Cheslatta peoples’ demands to the officials including their refusal to surrender, pleas to save their land and traplines and crucial concerns that cemeteries needed to be moved above flood level (Robertson 1992, Cheslatta Archives Southside, BC). DIA agent, Howe, commented:

“The Indians countered with fantastic and unrealistic demands, which were definitely out of the question. I would point out at this time that the interpreter, Abel Peters, son of the Chief, and a veteran of World War II, was very difficult to deal with, being against any sort of compromise while at the same time not being able to give any basis for the demands he supported.”

(1952 Telegrams compiled by Mike Robertson, Cheslatta Archives Southbank, BC)

DIA officials prevented the Cheslatta from negotiating upon their own behalf and described them as “childlike” people in whom “logic was absent” and presented with an ultimatum: refuse surrender without compensation and relocate, or surrender, relocate and receive fair compensation (Dawson 2002: 161). The Cheslatta refused surrender and officials nonetheless forged their signatures onto the surrender document.⁹

⁹ 1991 forensic scientist, Donald Brown, examined three “surrender” documents purportedly signed by the Cheslatta Chief and Council on April 21, 1952. Cheslatta community members always denied signing these documents. Brown examined the documents for the Land Claims case and concluded the documents were forged (Cheslatta Archives).

When the reservoir filled, it drowned all the prime timber growing around its perimeter, flooded homes, fields and roads, and altered the entire topography of the landscape. The very *keyah* that defined the Cheslatta T'en was obliterated by the dam that flooded 120,000 acres and emptied two-thirds of the original river (Billard 2012). Before the Kemano Project, the headwaters of the Nechako River flowed eastward, draining into the Fraser River. Alcan diverted 70 percent of the river's flow to run westward and created the 250-mile long Nechako Reservoir by flooding together a chain of lakes: Ootsa, Tetachuk, Intata, Nataalkuz, Chelaslie, Whitesail and Tahtsa with the Kenney Dam and 9 smaller dams (Lawton 1953: 890). Facing treacherous road and trail conditions, the Cheslatta began their exodus to Grassy Plains, 30 miles north. In an interview with Peter Dawson, Pat Edmund recalled, "When we were flooded out we couldn't move all the cattle or horses, there was too much ice and mud, we had to let them loose or they would have all drowned. Some did" (Dawson 2002: 223). Cheslatta elder Mack Jack recounted, "They were rushing us out, so we left everything behind. We left six horses behind, everything lost. Couldn't find anything (Mack Jack, Interviewed by Mike Robertson, 1982 Cheslatta Archives Southbank, BC). Pat Edmond said, "The flood water tore the river banks away...It sounded like a bunch of jet planes roaring, then the whole side of the hill was torn off and floated away" (Dawson 2002: 216). Elder Mabel Jack recalled, "All was flooded over. The only thing we could save was the clothes on our backs and one tent, there was all sorts of raw furs we caught that would have provided for us that summer I hate to even think back what we had to go through after the flood, we had to keep moving to keep the horses alive" (Mabel Jack, Interviewed by Mike Robertson, 1984, Cheslatta Archives Southbank, BC). The relocation severely impacted the cohesiveness of the Cheslatta community and was followed by four decades of alcoholism, despair and unemployment (Byl 1992: 23). Chief Albert George said, "at our new location all there was to do was drink, what we had before was gone. We lost our land, we lost our culture. Hunting, trapping and fishing, gone" (Chief Albert George, Interviewed by Mike Robertson, 1982 Cheslatta Archives, Southbank BC).

Officials feared the Cheslatta would return to their homes one day; they were aware that some of the Cheslatta buried important belongings beneath the soil in hopes of returning home to retrieve them. Contractors hired by Alcan and the Ministry of Forests razed Cheslatta villages and ranches at Cheslatta Lake while Cheslatta members were navigating treacherous conditions

seeking shelter in Grassy Plains (Robertson 1992). Alcan used metal detectors on the razed remains to ensure all traces of Cheslatta existence were destroyed (Robertson 1992).

Alcan and DIA officials were indifferent to Cheslatta cultural and spiritual property; an Indian Affairs agent flew in by helicopter and razed the Cheslatta church himself. The Cheslatta constructed the church entirely by hand in 1915, and today the church ruins remain concealed beneath the flooded waters of Cheslatta Lake (Dawson 2002: 155). In stark contrast, officials commissioned a professional survey and relocation of a cemetery of Euro-Canadian settlers (Dawson 2002: 237).¹⁰ Along with the church, Alcan and BC destroyed crucial aspects of spiritual spatiality of the Cheslatta when they moved only four of the two hundred Cheslatta grave sites. The remaining grave houses and markers were placed in a pile and burned (Dawson 2002: 155). Gravesites provided the community with a sense of identity and continuity with their past (Windsor & Mcvey 2002: 156). Alcan erected a stone cairn over the ashes, adorned with an aluminum plaque that read:

This monument was erected in 1952 to the memory of the Indian men, women and children of the Cheslatta Band, laid to rest in the cemetery on Reservation Five, now under water. May they rest in Peace.

(Field Notes, July 2017).

The Alcan memorial concealed the destructive violence that took place and attempted to memorialize Cheslatta's presence to the past.¹¹ Alcan and the province tried to negate all signs of the Cheslatta; yet the power of the flooding waters would later disrupt these attempts and reveal remains from the flood that would invite Cheslatta's resistance to Alcan and BC.

In May 1952, one month after the Cheslatta were flooded out, Arneil declared in reference to the Cheslatta that "the Indian problem is settled" (Dawson 2002: 226). In the following months, the Cheslatta community was in complete social disarray and referred to themselves as "refugees in our own land," living in tents at the Grassy Plains (Dawson 2002: 210). Some survived under the cover of spruce trees. Tuberculosis, suicide, depression and alcoholism swept through the community. In a testimony for the Cheslatta's Specific Claims

¹⁰ Their actions demonstrate a "hierarchy of debris in which rubble is looked down upon as a lesser inferior type of matter, as material without significance destined to be removed," (Gordillo 2014: 10).

¹¹ Alcan's memorial reflects modernity and colonial efforts to present itself as a break from the past, separated from the present (Gordillo 2014: 8). As Gaston Gordillo notes, the elite fear of rubble in moments of unrest is that "rubble could be an invitation to remake the world differently" (2014: 264).

Hearing, Chief Marvin Charlie stated: “The combination of the relocation, the loss of trap lines, the tuberculosis, the resulting poverty and the loss of the Cheslatta lands had a devastating effect on my people” (Published in Dawson 2002: 225).

After two years in displaced limbo, living in squalor, the DIA finally gave Cheslatta families their meager surrender compensation of \$50 per family (Christensen 1995, 81). However, compensation was administered with the condition that the money would purchase land for new reserves with new regulations on where the Cheslatta could hunt and when they could fish. Not until late 1964, twelve years after the relocation had taken place, did the resettlements receive official Indian Reserve Status. In this newly displaced world, community members grew isolated from one another. The resettlement area, chosen by DIA officials, challenged the ability for families to visit one another as individual reserves span 273 km. To drive through the entire reserve area would take 6 hours (Larsen 2003). The DIA settled the Cheslatta individually by terms of nuclear families, which prohibited their sense of place and practice of keyah (Byl 1992: 252). The fragmentation of reserves and flooded lands upended the keyah system that had formed an integral foundation to the socio-political dynamics of Cheslatta (Larsen 2003: 162). During an interview with a community member who wishes to remain anonymous, they said: “[My dad], he was a strong hunter he told stories of how before, everyone and everything was family, hospitable and happy to see each other but now [since the relocation] a lot of animosity between families, so much jealousy, alcoholism, drug abuse and addiction. People don’t visit anymore, growing up they were always visiting other families, setting fishing nets and camping” (Interview Notes July, 2017).

Ever since the Nechako River was diverted for the Kenney Dam, water is flushed through the Skins Lake spillway into the Cheslatta water system. The frequent flooding has turned the entire 80-kilometer stretch of Cheslatta Lake and the river above it into a torrent of silt and debris (Hume 2015). In a letter written to the Department of Indian Affairs in 1996, a Cheslatta member wrote, “We have seen for ourselves the graveyard that used to be at Cheslatta No. 9 Reserve. It is all gone, and we do not know where the dead have gone. All the dead have floated away and have gone ashore anywhere Bill Clark of Cheslatta seen a coffin floating in the middle of the lake” (Dawson 2002: 223). Alcan has yet to address ongoing flooding of the Cheslatta gravesites despite promises to install a cold-water release system that would properly manage

flows to stop the frequent flooding of Cheslatta Lake.¹² In 2007, a record high discharge flow from the spillway flooded two graveyards on the north side of Cheslatta Lake (Lakes District News 2007). In 2011, within 20 hours of notice from Alcan, the Cheslatta rushed to remove the sacred grave markers from cemeteries along the shores of Cheslatta Lake as the water level began to unexpectedly rise. Band members carried to higher ground 140 grave markers, referred to as “spirit houses” (Hume 2011). These spirit houses are meant to shelter the spirits of those buried in the ground. Each gravesite is marked with long metal rods, bearing crosses, and corner pins so they can be relocated with metal detectors after waters recede. In 2012, following the discovery of 25 human bones washed ashore from Cheslatta Lake, over 200 community members drove 50 km from the Cheslatta Carrier Nation band office to gather for the Return of the Spirits Ceremony at Cheslatta Lake. Former Chief Peters said, “It is shocking that this desecration is allowed to continue in Canada” (Billard 2012). The intention of the ceremony was to honor the memory of over 60 ancestors whose graves washed into the lake since 1952 due to the flooding at Kenney Dam and return the bones to a final resting place. Six youth carried a large wooden coffin which held recently recovered remains while two Roman Catholic priests blessed the remaining graves that are still intact (Komadina 2012).

Coordinator of the ceremony, Chief Corrina Leween said, “Our ancestors were forced to pack up and leave the only homes they knew. It was a long trek, so they buried some of their possessions, but the Department of Indian Affairs came in with metal detectors and dug up the possessions and destroyed them. Our people entrusted that they would be safe, but the land was flooded, their homes were gone, their possessions were gone ... all washed into Cheslatta Lake. Today we are taking another step in recognizing our lost loved ones and in the fight for our rights as a people. We are gathered to honor the people that were washed away ... today another stone is turned on these shores” (Billard 2012). “It saddens me greatly that my ancestors cannot rest. My people have to continually re-live the horrors we suffered when our lands were originally flooded 60 years ago by the construction of the Kenney Dam,” said former Chief Richard Peters

¹² See more regarding the cold-water release facility: Sheedy, Bruce. 2005. *Analysis of a Cold Water Release Facility in the Nechako Reservoir*. (Burnaby, BC: Simon Fraser University Library). Hooper, C. 2016. Alcan water deal a relic of the past. *Prince George Citizen*.

(Kitimat Daily 2012). As Ann Stoler writes, “Ruins are not just found, they are made. They become repositories of public knowledge and new concentrations of public declaration” (2003: 201). The very power of that site is verified by Alcan’s agenda to erase any signs of the Cheslatta. The flooded remnants of the Cheslatta’s burial sites and lands, storied with collective memory of the flood, informed the Cheslatta’s insistence for justice and resolution.

As recently as 2015, the Cheslatta would continue to retrieve bodies, bones and caskets that washed up on the shore from flooding water levels. In response to the continuous flooding of burial grounds, Cheslatta founded the Nechako River Legacy Project to fight for a cold-water release system to stop the flooding of the Cheslatta Lake and enable the community to recover skeletal remains. The bones of the Cheslatta ancestors are the evidence of the destruction Alcan tried to conceal and they inform the Cheslatta’s struggles to find resolution and justice. For 35 years, the BC government and Alcan promised the Cheslatta a cold-water release facility but failed to uphold their commitment. For the Cheslatta, the ruin left in the wake of the flood became their epicenter for claims to identity, land and justice.

Chapter 3: Aerial Parallels and the Everyday

The blades whirled to life, reaching a shuddering speed as the helicopter lifted off the ground. The pilot turned to the group, gesturing with his thumbs up, “good to go.” The horizon expanded before me as we ascended into the 2-hour aerial tour of impact sites in the Nechako River region from Alcan’s Kenney Dam. Behind me sat two Alcan officials.¹³ Next to them sat Mike Robertson, Cheslatta’s non-Indigenous Senior Policy Advisor. Flight conditions were perfect: clear blue skies on a warm, early summer day but the political climate was turbulent. The Cheslatta are currently in two negotiation tables to resolve longstanding grievances from their forced displacement and flooded lands; one with the British Columbia provincial government and the other with Alcan. At Cheslatta’s insistence, Alcan agreed to arrange for a helicopter tour to visit the various impact sites. “We are hoping that they will be a little more human with us when they see everything and see what we are talking about when we talk about just how much damage they’ve done,” Mike told me as we walked to board the helicopter (Field Notes, July 2017). While conversation during the tour between the parties was polite, the mood was tense. Alcan officials expressed their impatience about the rate at which negotiations were taking place. In the same moment of an exchanged joke, there were sentiments about time running out, that Cheslatta’s “window of opportunity,” would be closing, as one official told Mike. Mike hoped that this visual experience would elicit empathy and accountability from Alcan, as we flew over hundreds of kilometers of vast timber cuts and swaths of dead forests from the pine beetle infestation, flooded forests and burial sites.

As we flew over flooded forests, the tops of trees juttied out from the water; the branches bleached from the water looked frosted. What were once hilltops from the valley and surrounding forests are now referred to by the province as “islands.” The renaming of land and waterscapes to “islands” serves to make invisible the valleys and forests of the original landscape, normalizes the violence that created such drastic alterations and privileges Western colonial orientations of the land that discounts how the land had been before Alcan flooded the

¹³ For purposes of maintaining anonymity, I am leaving out any descriptive identifiers, such as gender, other than their representation of Alcan in their official title and affiliation with the company.

Nechako River.¹⁴ The hilltops are grassy, forested knolls scattered throughout the reservoir. Shorelines are saturated with the debris of drowned timber. With a depth of approximately 1,000 feet, the reservoir created by Alcan's dams submerged Cheslatta's traplines and the Cheslatta Trail, an ancient trade route connected to the Grease Trail.¹⁵ I think of this landscape as what Joy Parr calls a "lostscape," a space forever changed by colonial-capitalistic development and the turmoil that ensues from the "commodification of nature" (2010: 105).

The helicopter lands at Cheslatta Lake where rows of salvaged spirit houses sit near the shore. Mike tells the Alcan officials about the importance of these grave sites and both officials offer their condolences. Mike emphasizes the need for better managed water flows and the Alcan official nods saying, "It's emotional for sure." The flows of water levels are now temporally managed by Alcan and they continuously flood burial sites at Cheslatta Lake. The water is still, glass-like, and it inspires ideas of commodification for the Alcan official who said, "Now, I'm gonna be selfish here, the water is very beautiful but it's not producing anything..." his voice trailed off. This casual comment evokes the sentiment that any natural resource not used is wasted, emblematic of the very ideology that enabled the proliferation Alcan's engineering agenda upon the land 66 years ago.

No one says anything. Then, "Well, I think we have to high tail it out of here and cut it short." The tour exceeded its allotted time and we all pile back into the helicopter. Rising again over the land back to Prince George, I catch a glint of the aluminum plaque on one of Alcan's stone cairn memorials erected upon a bare hillside. We fly back in silence. I am struck by how this helicopter ride is comprised of an entirely non-Indigenous group. We fly over the land assessing what may be discerned from the sky, recreating a similar helicopter ride that took place 68 years ago when corporate officials and government representatives flew over the same area in their assessment of potential development without any engagement with or thought of the Cheslatta. The helicopter ride fell short of generating the empathy and compassion Mike had

¹⁴ I refer to this landmark feature as hilltops in the present because that is how the Cheslatta are intentionally referring to them as opposed to the provincial identifier, "islands."

¹⁵ The Nuxalk-Carrier Grease Trail spans the traditional territories of the Nuxalk in Bella Colla Valley, the Heiltsuk of Bella Bella and Southern Carrier people of the Interior Plateau, where oolichan grease was carried from the coast to the interior. The trail served as routes for travel and other trades (Sutherland 2001).

hoped for. The Cheslatta have made several efforts to elicit recognition by Alcan officials of the harms caused, with little success.¹⁶



Figure 1.1: The hilltops or provincial “islands.” Photo by Author

¹⁶ In 1990, the Cheslatta filed a \$122 million court case against the Canadian government which settled out of court for less than \$7 million (Windsor and McVey 2005: 155). In 1998, the Cheslatta filed a Statement of Claim with the Supreme Court of British Columbia disputing all agreements and licenses issued to Alcan by the federal and provincial governments. The appeal was dismissed in Alcan’s favor with no further legal actions in effect (Cheslatta Carrier Nation v. British Columbia 2000).



Figure 2.1: Driftwood from the flood, flooded forest. Photo by Author

Mike and I left Prince George and drove to Burns Lake; from there we caught the inland ferry to cross Francois Lake, a 120-kilometer body of water that separates the area from the Yellowhead Highway 16 and the regional center of Burns Lake (Larsen 2004: 945). The band office is based in Southbank, locally referred to as “Southside,” on the south shore of Francois Lake. To reach the Southside, one must take an inland ferry to cross Francois Lake.

“They say that to go to Southside is to go back in time. Once you cross the ferry, you’re pretty remote from everything. Living in town [Burns Lake] as I do now, I know that Burns Lakers see the Southside as remote with nothing to do for entertainment. Just farming and logging. You’ve got to have a pretty specific reason to cross that ferry. But Southsiders have lived here in this isolation for their whole lives, eh? This is home for them” (Larsen 2004: 951).

Once on the Southside, there are no restaurants, stores, billboards or streetlights. Instead, there are seemingly endless rolling hills, farms, hay fields and large swaths of aspen, pine and swamp spruce. Every couple of kilometers, forestry service roads cut out from the main roadway. Forestry has brought significant economic growth to Cheslatta in recent years. Chief Corrina referred to it as their “bread and butter” but it also impacts traplines, hunting and harvesting from

the land. “The traplines were our last ways to make money without having to work for white people,” an elder told me months later over moose meat burgers (Field Notes, April 2018).

We drive to the abandoned hardware store where I lived for the duration of my field work. Over the next several weeks, I learned about the challenges posed by the vast community dispersal from the resettlement. Initially, I anticipated that my methodology would predominantly incorporate Pilar Riano-Alcala’s concept of “walkabouts” which are guided walks led by residents to places considered significant for sensory and mnemonic engagement (2000). “Walkabouts” can evoke stories of relationships between people and places along with memories of specific events on the land (Riano-Alcala 2000:17). However, once in the field I realized the logistical challenges of conducting “walkabouts” because of the extent of geographic fragmentation after their forced displacement. I learned there is a distance of 173 km between all the reserves, a result of the Cheslatta’s displacement and resettlement when forcibly removed from their traditional territories. I entered the field with spatial expectations of closer community proximity and cohesion among homes, the band office and central spaces. The resettlement reserve parcels are spread far apart and cover great distances; there is no central community gathering space except for the band office. Visits to different homes and the band office required long drives and resettlements are far from the traditional territory.

Some people in the community are unable to make the long treks back into town because they don’t have a driver’s license, access to a vehicle, or the funds for gasoline. The closest grocery store is a ferry ride back across Francois Lake to the nearest town, Burns Lake, all of which would take over 2 hours’ travel time. The Mennonite shop in Grassy Plains, 12 km from the ferry, sells staple items like eggs, meats and baked goods. In 2003, Cheslatta, along with three neighboring First Nations, established the first health center on the Southside. However, this center has limited capacity to address varying medical needs. Traplines and berry harvesting sites have been impacted by logging, along with knowledge transmission of hunting, trapping and harvesting. These are the everyday challenges of ongoing displacement impacts. I arrived at Cheslatta at a time the Chief and Council called “historic” given their collective efforts to see the community “moving forward” from ongoing displacement impacts. They were in the early stages of settlement negotiations with Alcan and the provincial government.

The ongoing impacts of the displacement have resulted in unemployment, reliance upon welfare support, drug and alcohol abuse, suicides and mental health challenges for Cheslatta community members (Buhler 1998; Community Plan 2017). The Chief and Council organized a series of community meetings in 2017 to draft a comprehensive Community Plan for members to bring forth their vision for a better future. The Community Plan also served as a foundational framework to inform how the band would proceed in negotiations with the BC province and Alcan. The informational meetings at the band office for the Community Plan elicited significant feedback from members about the ongoing impact of their forced displacement. Because of the resettlement, there isn't a central meeting place for the community and this contributes to a sense of disconnect and isolation. Many community members brought forward the need for a gathering space to foster a stronger sense of community. Others noted the challenges of the terrain and lack of infrastructure: "we need access to our territory, all of our reserves. Roads should be up to standards for car transportation" (Community Plan 2017).

Many members state that for them, the land evokes the need for healing. In notes from the Community Plan meeting that I was given access to by Chief and Council, members wrote about healing, culture and the land. They were asked to write down what they need. Responses included: "reclaim and healing the territory which will be a huge step in healing personally;" "we need to bring back our language before it dies out completely;" "think of the future;" "to grow and unite – I would like to move home;" "we need healing in our community;" "it's important to members to have some healing. Tragedies like the residential schools, or the flooding at #7, or even substance abuse have left members in need of healing;" "my vision for the future of Cheslatta is just bringing members back to the territory, back to their roots, back to the ways of living a healthier lifestyle;" "revive our culture, language and traditions;" "reclaim, heal our territory;" "we need wellness knowledge and healing." The band members evoke the past within present articulations of how they imagine their future.

In an interview with a Cheslatta community member who wishes to remain anonymous, I was told:

I get angry because it starts to look awful out there, water everywhere, the graveyards covered so you can't walk around the graveyards or shoreline, the ground has cracks all over it, the driftwood is all over the place—it doesn't look right. I've always wondered how did they live, what did they do there and day dream about their life at Cheslatta. I could literally sit on the shoreline for hours. I don't find healing here because its not our traditional territory but out at Cheslatta Lake, yes. I would love to

live there. This displacement feels like we don't really belong and the government doesn't really care as long as we were put somewhere. There's just no sense of belonging with the community we are all basically related but everyone is so emotionally distant. Healing can bring people back together, I always hoped it would return to how it was before. Seeing the hilltops in the water is aggravating because you can't do anything about it" (Interview February 2018).

The community member expresses the problematic embodiment of resettlement, in the sense of emotional distance amongst band members and of not belonging on these resettled lands. The carelessness of the way the Cheslatta were displaced and then resettled years later is also embodied and internalized in the present, as expressed by the community member in feeling that the government didn't care "as long as we were put somewhere." The flooded landscape evokes sentiments of anger and frustration, memories of what took place and the lack of resolution, the landscape is a constant visual reminder. In another interview by an anonymous participant, they said, "I'm scared wondering if that would happen again, if we would lose our home" (Interview, February 2018). The trauma of the Cheslatta's exodus from their homelands carries on in the experiences of everyday resettlement. How are these embodiments of impacts accounted for when quantifying losses or assessing impacts from environmental surveys and aerial vantage points?

While band members voiced concern and desire for a stronger sense of community through long-term spatial developments with a community gathering place, events such as the annual Campout on their traditional territory at Cheslatta Lake and meetings at the band office serve to bring people together to discuss and plan ways to move forward. Over time, the band office has functioned as a site for social repair and agency in the community. It is where band member meetings were held throughout the 1990s that resulted in a Specific Land Claims Settlement with the federal government and it is where today, various community members engage in important roles that support different aspects of the Cheslatta community. The Band Office buzzes with activity early every morning at 7 a.m. Community members crowd the kitchen to fill Styrofoam cups with coffee and spoonfuls of Coffee Mate. Kris, the secretary, fields phone calls and delivers messages. Mike darts to and from the archive building with different documents that he's gathering for their ongoing negotiations. Visitors line the hall waiting to meet with the Chief. On one of those busy mornings, I visited Chief Corrina in her office to find her slicing moose meat on her desk. "Yeah, you see this piece? This will be too tough," Chief Corrina said

while tossing a piece of meat into a metal tray on her desk. With a skilled, gloved hand she carved a large hunk of meat that had been gifted to her. She carefully stacked slices of meat that she would later smoke for the elders.

Until the 1951 amendment to the Indian Act, Indigenous women could not run for Chief and Council, nor could they vote in elections (Simpson 2017: 109). Chief Corrina has been elected by her community for three terms; she tells me that her grandmother had told her that one day she would be Chief. Her role as Chief is supported by the invaluable work and dedication from Jessi, the band office assistant. Jessi's role is a keystone piece to the entire Band Office operation. While Chief Corrina carved the meat, Jessi sat in the corner, consumed with answering Chief Corrina's emails on her iPhone while fielding incoming phone calls. More community members pile into the office to visit. One of them shares a music video by N'we Jinan artists, "Hide and Seek," of youth singing about intergenerational trauma and healing. One of the singers is a young Cheslatta person. The lyrics and music fill the room:

"In darkness, covered in shame. Hear the voices, follow the footsteps of our past
Your roots are calling, whisper softly you will find where you belong
Come and find me, because I've been hiding
If you feel alone, or if your language is gone, it's up to you to see what's hidden or lost
Look for your spirit, do you know there's a story beneath your feet of this sacred land
Now looking for direction, let me find the current, there is reconciliation every time we learn.
(N'we Jinan Artists, "Hide & Seek" lyrics, 2017).

People are emotional watching the video and they express how proud they are. "These guys are coming to the campout," Chief Corrina tells everyone. Chief Corrina keeps a large white board outside of her office where she writes a Carrier word of the day along with her schedule of travel for work. People visit Chief Corrina's office throughout the day for a quick catch up, to follow up on a work opportunity, or asking for support from the band for food or fuel. The bustle of life moving through the band office demonstrates ways in which some community members actively navigate the stress of ongoing reconciliation negotiations while working toward the wellbeing of the Cheslatta community. This space also houses traditions, cultural identity, language and history in material relics. Glass cases filled with miniature carved canoes, woven baskets and hunting tools line the main hallway of the band office. The walls of the band office's meeting room are covered in framed photographs of Cheslatta ancestors, elders, and community members on their traplines. There is an image of the church that the Cheslatta erected in 1915,

and images of their lands before the flood. In the Cheslatta Archives, there are shelves of audio recordings of band meetings dating back to the early 1970s; DIA records retrieved to support their Specific Land Claims Settlement Case; land use maps; recorded interviews with elders; and, a comprehensive Carrier language dictionary created from knowledge of the elders.

When Mike gave me a tour of the meeting room he told me, “The Cheslatta t’en almost went extinct. It was the early fur traders, surveyors and missionaries that spread smallpox, influenza and measles, devastating the Cheslatta population, then the Lejac residential school and the Kenney Dam was the final killer” (Field Notes, July 2017). This characterization of the Cheslatta reflects the stereotype of the “extinct Indian” that normalizes and enables the erasure of existing Indigenous communities, while relegating them to the past (Fleming 2007). This characterization of the Cheslatta is incorrect, as is evident in the present-day participation of community members in the Community Plan along with carefully archived oral and material evidence of their history. Members of the Cheslatta community want to revive elements of their history and culture. The concept of extinction is emblematic of the notion that tradition is a static, fixed entity, which denies the possibility for people to change while still maintaining a sense of identity. Translations of Carrier language that adorn the kitchen and posters on the bathroom walls translate anatomy into Carrier. While there continues to be significant loss from the displacement and aftermath of resettlement that impacted transmission of intergenerational knowledge, language, and cultural customs, the community is not passive in the face of these challenges. The daily workings at the band office are proof that community members are actively attending to current issues.

One of the first things Chief Corrina and Mike asked me to help with during my time there was to coordinate filmmakers, Max and Kendall, documenting the Campout and Cheslatta’s focus on moving forward. I proposed a community breakfast to Chief Corrina to introduce myself to band members and use it as a space for them to provide any feedback or questions they might have about my work. The timing of this community breakfast also coincided with the first visit of one of the filmmakers. We decided to make the community breakfast event one in which Chief Corrina would explain the purpose of the film project. I would introduce my research and the filmmaker, Kendall, would introduce herself to the community. That morning, the filmmaker and I woke up at six am to prepare a large banquet of pancakes, eggs, potatoes, bacon, and fruit.

Once breakfast was served in the Band Office meeting room, Chief Corrina introduced me, “she has been researching what we have been through for quite some time and she’s out here on her own dime at no cost to the Cheslatta, so spread the word. The work you are doing is important with memory and our resilience.” After the introductions, community members offered suggestions about the film. One band member said, “we should call the film, ‘scars remain.’” Chief Corrina then told the filmmaker that they are trying to capture the negotiation process and the return to the land. She told her and those present that it was “important to capture development that’s happened since the dreams are coming true, we are returning to the land, employing membership, negotiating with the province, we don’t want to miss the reconciliation piece, make or break era with the government. The footprints are on the land of our ancestors that were there before us, it’s where we lived” (Field Notes, July 2017).

The negotiations that Chief Corrina mentioned are a source of hope but also of tension and stress for the Cheslatta band members and staff working on them. Throughout various calls and meetings that I was invited to witness, the members of Chief and Council constantly had to navigate government bureaucracy and the corporate interests of Alcan as part of in the process. Issues included delayed payments on behalf of Alcan, disagreements about the purpose of the negotiations, questions of what, quantifiably, would be sufficient to redress grievances, and who really benefits from the agreements. There were discrepancies in the ways that damage was assessed in these negotiations. Mike asked, “How can they assess damage when they’re not using the archives?” The Chief and Council are also engaged in an ongoing struggle to get Alcan to agree to the implementation of a water release facility, despite this being promised for over 30 years. The Chief and Council hope to move forward despite Alcan’s empty promises and independently implement a cold-water release facility with the support of the First Nations Major Projects Coalition.¹⁷

There is a sense of urgency from both sides. Alcan wants the negotiations to settle quickly so they can put an end to the challenges and complaints they view as being confined to the past. While for the Chief and Council, there are concerns about intergenerational impacts

¹⁷ The First Nations Major Projects Coalition (FNMPC) aims to work with member First Nations to enhance economic well-being supported by vibrant cultures, languages and expressions of traditional laws. FNMPC aims to ensure First Nations receive a fair share of benefits from projects undertaken in the traditional territories of its members and explore ownership opportunities of projects proposed in the traditional territories of its members (Major Projects Coalition Constitution).

from delayed settlements with both negotiation tables. “We may miss this opportunity to capture elders’ knowledge and dialect. Our elders are going missing daily, we have such a short period to actually construct the cultural center. They are diminishing the benefits the longer we wait for it. Our land and people were the ones damaged,” said Chief Corrina (Field Notes, July 2017). The Chief and Council have encouraged the province to fast-track advance payments for construction of a training center to support band member employment with skills such as carpentry, trapping, and technology, along with a cultural center. For the Chief and Council, moving forward entails the vision set forth by the band members in the Community Plan. It is the hope of a better future in securing a reconciliatory settlement with the province and Alcan. It is a future that includes and relies on all members; those who elected the first woman as their Chief, the elders who speak Dakelh, band office employees like Jessi and Kris, and the youth who are curious about what their land and culture can offer. Together they all hold up the social world of Cheslatta in the present, day after day.

3. 1 The Campout

Our car lurched over rocks and uneven terrain, the dirt road was bleached by the hot summer sun. Blinding dust clouds billowed out from behind a truck that barreled down the road ahead. At each hairpin turn in the road, a sign stapled onto a wooden stake directed us: *Cheslatta Campout This Way*. Every summer for the past 26 years, the Cheslatta community has returned to their traditional territory at Cheslatta Lake for five days. No one can live long-term at Cheslatta Lake because of its unpredictable flooding that continues due to the lack of a cold-water release facility. Because of this, organizing the Campout requires Alcan’s cooperation to mitigate flood levels to ensure the land can be visited, that structures won’t be under water and grave sites can be accessed for visits during the temporary return of the Cheslatta band members. For weeks, everyone in the community and band office have tirelessly prepared for what is perhaps their most highly anticipated annual community event. From many informal conversations and interviews with Cheslatta band members about the Campout and Cheslatta Lake, there is a common shared sentiment about the sense of “peace” felt there. Once the Campout dates are determined, a year in advance people request time off work from their jobs at logging camps, running the barge and road construction. Some fly out from Vancouver or drive from Prince George to make it to the gathering. Daniel, a Cheslatta band member explained to

me, “The campout is a crazy feeling, no fighting, everything is peaceful. Something about being on that land, everyone puts their tents out, it’s such a relief being out there” (Interview, February 2018).

Approaching Cheslatta Lake, the road comes out to a stunning vista of rolling hills and sparkling lakes, made visible through charred forest remains following the 2010 Binta wildfire that burned through 40,000 hectares of forests. The blackened spires stand in stark contrast to the bright blue, cloudless sky. The road winds past logging sites and plots reforested with young saplings from tree planters. After driving for nearly an hour with Max, the filmmaker, and Daniel’s daughter, we reached a sudden downhill descent through dense pine and aspen. The forestry road opened out onto a clearing, revealing Cheslatta Lake. Max and I gasped “Wow,” at the same time. Through the clearing, the first thing you see are the gravesites, exposed white coffins resting in tall grass that face out onto Cheslatta Lake. I had been here before, but arriving by land instead of by air with Alcan officials was a completely different experience. In that very moment, I understood the visualist bias that comes from distancing the subject through hierarchical verticality. Alcan’s historical and contemporary modes of assessing and understanding the land, rely upon a Cartesian, visual emphasis that is linear, mechanistic, nationalistic and fixed, which serves to “entrench notions of objective knowledge and visual authority” (Parr 2010: xv)¹⁸. Being on the land with members of the Cheslatta community gave me a sense of multifaceted, inter-relational and discursive understandings of a landscape that challenges this hierarchy of the senses.

As we slowly drove past the graves, a large tent emblazoned with the blue Alcan logo came into view. I am told that Alcan officials get great photos that they can put in their newsletters for a token donation to the Campout every year of \$500 to \$1500. A couple of feet away sat a large teepee adorned with colorful, painted handprints. Mike purchased the teepee online years ago to begin a new Campout tradition. A smaller teepee was set up next to it that belongs to Derek, the Metis healer and ghost hunter hired by Chief Corrina to address a need for healing amongst band members at the Campout. The smokehouse was behind the Alcan tent, to

¹⁸ In 1951, Alcan and BC conducted surveys that would determine the future of the Cheslatta people. Some of these were engineering surveys, conducted in conjunction with the Kenney Dam construction, other surveys took inventories of the land such as the 1951 Archaeological Survey sponsored by the University of British Columbia, and Wilson Duff’s survey (Buhler 1998: 61).

the right is a gazebo built by Chief Corrina's husband, Leon. "The water will completely cover that gazebo when it floods, you know," Daniel later told me. The gazebo was about three times my height but at high flood levels it becomes submerged in the silty water. Walking in this space that constantly morphs from a body of water to dry land feels surreal.

A tall wood cross stands by the spirit houses near the glass-like Cheslatta Lake, its shores lined with water-logged timber. On the cross are painted stripes of red that mark the flood water levels from over the years. These water line markings and spirit houses are a testament to the violent events witnessed by Cheslatta as well as Cheslatta's agency in asserting different practices of historical truth-keeping. Despite Alcan's attempts at removing the Cheslatta from their land and relegating the displacement to the past through their stone cairn memorials, the Cheslatta continuously officiate the ongoing disturbances from the displacement through this public recording of water levels on the cross. The community's presence at and engagement with this landscape reveals many ways that they engage with the history of displacement and their everyday efforts at social repair and reclamation. The Campout is an annual witnessing of what took place 66 years ago but also the present reality that despite Alcan and BC's attempts to forever remove and sever the Cheslatta from their homelands, they continue to return.

Under the Alcan tent, Leon was busy setting up the kitchen with two large grill ranges and several long plastic dining tables. Bags of flour were stacked neatly in the back corner for the next day's bannock making competition. Children ran around the smokehouse; some were playing ring toss while elders talked around the bonfire. Tents, RVs and campers are scattered around the lake. Chief Corrina boned and skinned several salmon, saved from the year before. "This year there literally is no salmon. None of the First Nations are fishing the Skeena," she tells me. "We usually do 300 fish per day but we're only using this fish today because I want to show the kids." Her granddaughter and another young girl stood next to her, poking at the fish eggs she laid on the table. "I learned how to debone salmon from a man from Lake Babine Nation," she says while she swiftly slices the fish and nimbly tosses slabs of salmon onto sheets of butcher paper. Chief Corrina's granddaughter ran over to me, tightly grasping a long lump of roe in her palm declaring, "I have fish! I have fish!" After a few minutes, Corinna was joined by Leon, who sliced thin, long strips of salmon while she salted the strips, preparing the salmon for the smokehouse. In this flurry of traditions, new and old, amid intergenerational teachings,

people in the community are holding up their social and material worlds through fluid practices of social repair.

Countless times, Chief Corrina and community members have expressed their desire for healing; it's a popular, widely shared sentiment because many loved ones struggle with substance abuse, ongoing trauma from residential school experiences, suicide or depression. In hopes of bringing more healing to the community at the Campout, Chief Corrina hired Derek, a medicine man to attend the gathering.¹⁹ I first met Derek under the Alcan tent along with several other community members. People asked him to share his insights on alcoholism, suicide and tragic losses of loved ones. The memories of these struggles are sources of unresolved, ongoing grievances. Derek encouraged everyone to put out memorials for those who have passed, to visit grave sites, and honor the dead with flowers. The organizers of the Campout made efforts to address the need for "healing" in the community by hiring Derek, a professional therapist to attend afternoon activities, inviting Father Dominic a catholic priest from Ghana to lead prayers, and designating the Campout as a "sober space." Over lunch, I asked Jesse, a Cheslatta band member, what inspired him to get his medical training. He tells me how drug overdose calls are scary and it's a problem everywhere he goes, that this is the only way he feels he can be of use in the community by knowing how to help. A focus on healing showed in the support people shared for those returning from treatment and in the concern people had for each other's wellbeing.

Throughout the day, one of the Cheslatta councilors, Ted, takes people out on his small motorboat to go fishing and boat around Cheslatta Lake. By the time the sun sets, Max and I joined Ted on the boat. We set out to drop a ling line, a fishing line hooked with meat, lowered into the lake with a soda bottle attached to the line for it to float overnight to lure in ling cod. The wind whipped around our faces as the boat picked up speed, bouncing along the water's surface. I wrote in my field notes of experiencing the flooded lands by boat in comparison to the initial experience by helicopter:

"Surreal, the landscape of a flooded forest—can you even call it a **landscape**? What do you call a place of flooded forest where osprey nests, that should be tens of feet above the ground, are perched on rotting tree tops, just barely above the water's surface? It feels like a deathscape of deception, with islands that were once hilltops, lush pine forests and an abrupt shoreline where the reservoir water claims the rest. The trees look as though they've been charred, trunks a dark smoky gray, the branches frosted with spiky tips, some still have pinecones on them – a testament to the continuum of

¹⁹ Title used by Corinna and how Derek refers to himself, interchangeably with healer.

life and cycles that once were and somehow continue to be. The land feels reduced to an imposed identity from the Crown dubbing the remains of hilltops as islands, grassy forested knolls dispersed throughout the reservoir in random clusters. Like the fractured reserves of the Cheslatta. Ted tells us stories about the caribou crossing the ice on the reservoir, shorelines are littered with debris from the flood. We are cruising over submerged forests. I'm thinking about Alcan's helicopter tour and thinking about the distance and disconnect from the air. It doesn't embody the surreal magnitude of impact, of 1100 ft. depth of this reservoir, 1100 ft. of trees."

(Field Notes, June 15, 2017).

Over the loud hum of the motor and wind, Ted shares stories of Cheslatta Lake and his childhood. His charisma and energy makes everyone laugh and lean in closer. It is abundantly clear how much Ted loves this place. He talked of his adventurous childhood competing in snowshoe races on frozen lakes and ice fishing. With pride, he described how his parents raised him to be tough, how they knew how to work hard and survive life in the bush, that he carried on these values in the joy he had working as a tree faller. "This is why we raised Jessi to be tough and resilient," he adds, referring to his daughter. He points to where Chief Corinna's parents used to have a cabin and where his parents used to live before the flood. Ted's guiding memory of where homes had been and what life was like stories this landscape that otherwise to a non-local would appear unoccupied, inundated with high water levels. He gestures to the forests and talks about the vast Cheslatta Trail²⁰. With awe and admiration, he tells me about the time a group of Cheslatta men traveled two thirds of the trail on horseback in the 1990s. "Man, I would like to do that trail," he says. I asked him, "What is it like coming back here every year, how does it feel to be out here?" Looking out at the water, Ted told me, "Coming to this place is always so emotional and peaceful. It's like coming home."

For Virginia, a Cheslatta elder, the Campout evoked memories of her childhood out on the land with her beloved grandfather who was dedicated to restoring a sense of normalcy after the flood. Families coming together at the Campout reminded Virginia of her family being pulled apart by the residential school system. She was six years old, drinking tea with her grandfather when a priest showed up at the door and took her away. Her grandpa packed her suitcase with care and she was sent on the train to Lejac residential school. Built upon a grassy hillside that

²⁰ The Cheslatta Trail was a major trade and communication route that connected Dakelh villages of Belhk'achek and Sdughachola on Cheslatta Lake to Nadleh Village on Fraser Lake to Dry William Lake. The trail was no longer in use after the 1952 flood. Parts of the trail have been restored by the Nadleh Whut'en First Nation, the Cheslatta T'en and the Vanderhoof Forest District (Cheslatta Trail Heritage Marker).

overlooked Fraser Lake, the school was in the heart of Carrier territory in northern BC. As with other residential schools in Canada, the purpose of Lejac was to remove the culture and language of Indigenous children. Its doors opened on January 17, 1922 and enrolled thousands of Carrier students. Many Cheslatta band members went to Lejac; it was located conveniently near the railway line used to transport children from their communities to the school. Virginia told me, “We kept saying why are we doing this? When we are walking towards this huge red building on this hill. It was so cold and scary looking. The sound of the train would always make me cry. I’m happy they burned that place down so I don’t have to see it anymore each time I drive by it.” The meals were sparse and mainly consisted of mush porridge. Virginia can still remember the smells of the nuns eating sausage, bacon and fried eggs. Because her grandpa couldn’t afford to take her home for Christmas, Virginia spent the holiday at Lejac. She came home to brothers and sisters she felt she no longer knew. The separation made them strangers to one another. At Lejac, the changing seasons became associated with painful memories of loss. Virginia remembers she couldn’t be there to help her grandfather hay. Complex emotions of anger, betrayal, loss and sadness that come from attending the school and the residual impacts, render vivid memories.²¹

Longstanding tensions about religion amongst some members of the Cheslatta community come from the historic oppression by missionaries and Lejac residential school. Other community members have found solace in practicing Catholicism and frequently attend the local church at Grassy Plains. Sometimes these tensions surface. Alcan, Father Dominic, and two police officers, all of whom were invited by the band council, attend an afternoon lunch at the Campout. Lunch opens with a Catholic prayer led by Chief Corrina, everyone gathered in a circle and silently held hands while she prayed. While standing in line for lunch with Jesse, Father Dominic walked by. Jesse reached out to shake his hand, and immediately started convulsing. A look of shock crossed the Father’s face, and Jesse broke out into laughter. When the Father walked away, Jesse started telling a story about a time in Prince George when a man told him, “God Bless,” to which Jesse replied, “what did you say to me? Are you Catholic?” The man responded, “yes,” and Jesse punched him. He then tells me his dad had joked earlier that the

²¹ The presence of family at the Campout and the history of what took place at Cheslatta Lake elicits sensorial memories that connect people here on this land. “Emotions provide definition and horizon to memories. Without such definition, they would not imprint themselves on the mind; without a horizon they would lack relevance and meaning within a specific cultural context,” (Field 2010: 44).

Father must be Cheslatta because he tans so fast. Alcan, the RCMP and Father Dominic's invitation to the Campout afternoon lunch and activities, situates them on the land with Cheslatta's presence, on Cheslatta's terms.

Darkness fell upon the poplar, pine and aspen. The full moon rose above Cheslatta Lake, its glowing reflection created a path to the shoreline. A loon call echoed from the water, there is distant laughter and chatter at the bonfire. I wandered down the ancient Cheslatta Trail along Cheslatta Lake to set up my tent. Stepping around bushes of wild roses, I found a patch of soft sand and dirt where the trees open out onto the shore of the lake. I pushed the stakes into the sand as the water lapped at the rocks on the shore.

People are up early in the morning, walking along the shore. The day is filled with activities set up at different stations. A wooden picnic table is crowded with community members and invited visitors who learn how to make deer hide drums; two men from Alcan attend the workshop. The fishing derby is underway. The bonfire still burns, some are gathered around it drinking coffee. Under the gazebo, arts and crafts are set up with children coloring and playing. People drift in and out of the smokehouse, tending to the fire. The strips of salmon hang from rows of horizontal wood poles from one end of the smokehouse to the other. Near the gazebo, there is a haircut and braiding station set up. Mike was gathering people to press painted handprints onto the canvas teepee. Kids jump off the dock into the water.

I walked over to the cooking area to help Leon set up for the bannock competition, dragging massive bags of flour to large bowls for the dough. Several frying pans are filled with oil that sizzles and pops. For days, people have been talking about the bannock competition and Tara Quaw, a Cheslatta band member, who remains undefeated. "Tara makes *the* best bannock, hands down," Mike told me. This sentiment is shared by many people I talked with about the competition. Judges took their seats at one of the long plastic tables and the competition began. In a flurry of hands mixing flour, lard, milk and water, there was laughter and competitive joking. Tara gently pulled the dough through her fingers in a circular motion, while simultaneously turning the bowl with her other hand. Tara's bannock is in a league of its own—the consistency is almost fluffy, a perfectly mixed batter without a single clump of flour. The motion of the spinning bowl and Tara pulling dough through her fingers was mesmerizing. Women plunk down hunks of batter in the frying pans, they turn over golden crisp bannock. Tara

snuck me a piece. The bannock was perfectly crisp on the outside, fluffy on the inside and melts in your mouth with rich flavor. Bannock filled plates were set up in the center of the judges' table, within a few minutes the consensus is in favor of Tara's undefeated bannock.

While I watched a game of horseshoes with a Cheslatta band member who was adopted into a non-Indigenous family, I was told about identity difficulties from those who have been adopted out. I was told that the Cheslatta community and culture at the Campout brought a sense of comfort and belonging. During our conversation, Chief Corrina gifted the young Cheslatta band member a miniature canoe carved from cotton wood by Pat, an elder. "Here, take this. Don't tell anyone you are taking it home with you." The young Cheslatta band member turned the canoe over in his hands, ran his fingers over the edges. Chief Corrina then walked over to a group of Cheslatta youth who were playing by the water and with a sweeping motion of her arm she tells them, "This is your land. This water is your water. You can fish here." She shifts to the side and points to the spirit houses resting in the tall grass. "These are your ancestors." The kids were silent. Corrina paused, looked around and repeated to them, "This is your land." Chief Corrina's interactions with youth locate the younger generation meaningfully on their land by inviting them to connect to a sense of place and history, a sense of rootedness and belonging. Gifting the elder's hand carved canoe, made by the only carver in the community, and sharing a sense of place with the children transmits memory. Through seeing the land and touching tangible tradition in the form of the canoe, Chief Corrina puts into action a form of remembering through the intergenerational transmission of customary knowledge.

The ongoing reconciliation negotiations have a presence at the Campout in the efforts of the Chief and Council to re-familiarize community members to their lands. At the Campout, the Chief and Council announced an event they organized for the end of the summer at Pondsosy Bay called, "Return to the Land." They encouraged every community member, especially the elders, to join on a chartered boat to the resort for a long weekend of fishing and family activities. Pondsosy Bay, located in Tweedsmuir Park, was a stopping point for the Cheslatta when they travelled west to Kimsquit to get salmon. As part of an "early implementation" component of the Settlement Agreement, BC provided an advance of funds to allow the Cheslatta Chief and Council to purchase the resort. "It's important for band members to see what they're getting from the reconciliation process since the BC government bought and gave Pondsosy to Cheslatta at no

cost,” Chief Corrina told the elder band members. The Chief and Council hope that bringing members out to the resort for community functions, retreats and fishing can function as a way for “healing on the land” and “community building.”

Later in the evening we feasted on Indian ice cream, which is whipped soap berries. “Some without sugar, the elders like it bitter and the younger generation likes it sweet,” Leon tells me. I walked by the cooking area, Corrina called out, “Maia! You have to try my famous fish stew!” Fragrant curry spices wafted around her while she stirred the simmering stew, a salmon head bobbed on the surface. Corrina asked if I could assist Max with all interviews for the film, the two of us interviewed Jesse, the three of us sat on washed up timber. It was Jesse’s first time being home on the Southside since he could remember. It had been 25 years. He didn’t know much about what happened with Cheslatta’s displacement but he knew his ancestral roots went back there; his grandmother was Chief Louie’s granddaughter. “I just heard they were flooded out and people died but I didn’t know much else,” he told me. I shared with him as succinctly as possible about what happened with the flood and forced displacement, that the Cheslatta were given less than 2 weeks’ notice to pack up their belongings and leave their homelands. “Wow I never knew that,” he responded. Jesse later asked me if I wanted to go with him on the quad to see where the grave sites had been moved to. He had spent the past several days clearing the trail for elders who he took out on the quad during the Campout to visit their loved ones. On the first afternoon, Minnie, who was only 9 years old when she walked out from the flood, approached him and said, “Jesse I want to visit with mom,”; she spoke in the present tense. Visits to the grave sites serve as acts of remembering, that start in the present and situate the individual by going back in time and revisiting the past.

To visit the grave sites, Jesse and I cut through the trees, up a steep grassy hill. Jesse stopped to show me strips of black on culturally modified trees where bark was removed to make baskets. Driving up the steep hill the quad was nearly vertical; I hung on tightly and we whipped around a sharp corner that turned out to the grave site. Rows of stone slabs, some almost entirely concealed by tall grass, were engraved with Dakelh syllabics. In front of the stone slabs was a small memorial erected by Alcan, a triangular pyramid of stones with an aluminum plaque looking out over the spirit houses. This was one of the three stone cairn monuments Alcan contractors erected at the different burial sites. I had seen Alcan’s aluminum plaque from the air

a month earlier when I flew over the site with the two Alcan officials and Mike. But here, after hanging tightly onto the quad while ascending nearly vertically up the hill—the extent of which the spirit houses were moved was tangible. We stood together in silence. After a few minutes, Jesse broke the silence, “These are my family...I guess.” While Jesse facilitated these visits for the elders, the elders in wanting to visit the graves of their loved ones could remember their pasts, their kin, connections with the land that are only possible when the waters recede enough to access the sites. Interactions with spirit houses and visits serve as remembering and an interaction with the past in the present, despite Alcan’s attempts to relegate the Cheslatta to the past through the stone cairn memorials.

We drove down the steep hill back to the Campout and Jesse asked me if we could cruise down on the beach for a bit before heading back. With the wind on our faces and the setting sun on the water, it was breathtaking. The silence helped me process what we had just seen and the elders we visited. Kids were jumping off the dock for a final swim before nightfall. That evening, Chief Corrina’s son took a group of young boys out on the boat to go fishing on the lake. Leon set out dessert of “Indian shortcake”—fresh bannock topped with whipped cream and a huckleberry sauce. Daniel and I competed against Ted and Leon in a game of horseshoes that was filled with competitive banter and laughter when Ted joked his toss was off because he didn’t cut his fingernails short enough. This is the everyday of social repair: the community visiting sites of memory and the presence of Cheslatta back on their land that fosters relations between past and present—where images, contexts, traditions, and interests come together, though not necessarily in the most harmonious or predictable of ways. The bannock competition, the spirit houses partially submerged in sunken soil, the laughter of children, the transmission of knowledge through stories of the land and teachings of traditional foods, elders visiting grave sites and Leon whipping soap berries— this is Cheslatta presence on the land.

Cheslatta’s annual Campout attests to loss and peoples’ experiences of the past, at the same time it is about recovery as practiced in the everyday. The return is a commemoration of what was and what continues to be through the act of gathering community and visiting on the land, a site of violence transformed into a site of social repair through Cheslatta’s reconstruction of the space into a site of lively community with new and old cultural practices. By enacting memory and agency on their land, the Cheslatta can also imagine and show what is possible.

Pilar Riano-Alcala writes of how returning to the land is also a return to the past in the present, that creates space for grieving, social cohesion and cultural revitalization (2015: 283, 284). When Ted shows where homes of his family and Chief Corrina's family used to be, he is re-contextualizing the space through his storytelling and memories. Remembering, "keeps things alive; it is a 'saving' awareness" (Riano-Alcala 2000: 9). The Campout is emblematic of the complex dynamics of social repair that take place amid the challenges that arise from tensions with B.C. and Alcan as impacts from the flooding remain unresolved. When Chief Corrina debones 2-year old salmon that is supplied from neighboring nations for youth to learn from, she is "regenerating nationhood" (Lawrence & Dua 2005:124). Cheslatta cannot be consigned to a "mythic past" or the "dustbin of history"; through their changing traditions that fuse together new and old, adapted and borrowed, the Cheslatta exist as real people in the present (Lawrence & Dua 2005:124).

3. 2 Moving Forward

Over Red Rose tea and fresh baked bread, an elder and I chatted about the ongoing Reconciliation negotiations between Cheslatta, BC and Alcan. She told me, "Corrina is fighting hard for us and everything we've been through. She's going to Ottawa, traveling around the country to these meetings to fight for us" (Field Notes, April 2018). Currently, the Chief and Council are engaged in two different negotiations, one with BC and the other with Alcan to resolve long-standing grievances from the flood. The negotiations have been a source of hope and pride in the community. But they have also strained community dynamics of trust, communication and transparency because the confidentiality agreements enforced by BC prevents full disclosure of negotiation proceedings in real time to band members. The Chief and Council are fervently trying to bring resolution to the Cheslatta community through various developmental initiatives mentioned in the 2017 Community Plan and anticipated benefits from the Reconciliation Negotiations.²² The Framework for Negotiation of the Reconciliation and Settlement Agreement between Cheslatta and BC states: "Time is of the essence."

²² "The term 'reconciliation' implies that the parties were once whole, experienced a rift, and now must be made whole again. But in colonial settings, this is not the case. The relationship between Indigenous and settler peoples in Canada was one of nations encountering nations, where one gradually oppressed and marginalized the other. Indigenous peoples never agreed to the denial of their sovereignty, cultures or identities" (Stanton 2011: 12). Power imbalances continue in Canada today. Brenda Gunn writes,

The primary objective of the Cheslatta's Reconciliation Framework is to "resolve long-standing issues relating to impacts arising from the creation and operation of the Nechako reservoir and associated works." I was told both Alcan and BC are seeking "forgiveness for all time" (Field Notes, April 2018). Legally, this typically means a release from any further liability. It remains unclear exactly how this concept of forgiveness will manifest in final negotiations, within the community and the implications it might have in the future for band members. Writing about Rwanda, Jeffery Olick writes:

"Forgiving serves to undo the deeds of the past while binding oneself through promises, serves to set up uncertainty [...] The President of Rwanda defines 'forgiveness' as "abandoning your right to pay back the perpetrator in his own coin," [...] Although Tutu and many other theorists insist that forgiving does not mean forgetting, others fear that forgiving not only will mean forgetting, but will induce a failure of recognition" (2007: 128; 181).

At the time of this thesis completion, it remains undetermined how the Chief and Council, Cheslatta band members, the province and Alcan interpret forgiveness. Glen Coulthard argues that the "state's rigid historical temporalization of the problem in need of reconciling (colonial injustice) leads to the current politics of reconciliation's inability to transform the structure of dispossession that continues to frame Indigenous peoples' relationship with the state" (2014: 120). What is the temporality of forgiveness? For the province, discourse in reconciliation negotiations frames acts of violence and oppression within a linear temporality of an isolated event, which denies the inextricability of intergenerational memories and the ways that knowledge and experiences in the past informs the lived present. Paul Connerton writes about "prescriptive forgetting" where an act of the state can be covert in ways of erasure by appearing to act in interests of all parties regarding a historic dispute because it can publically acknowledge reconciliation (2008: 61). Connerton adds, "sometimes at the point of transition from conflict to conflict resolution there may be no explicit requirement to forget, but the implicit requirement to do so is nonetheless unmistakable" (Ibid: 62). How do the reconciliation negotiations honor these temporal complexities, without erasure of the past and ongoing impacts, within their premise for forgiveness? The impacts of settler colonial violence didn't end when the Cheslatta community could finally resettle on Wet'suwet'en lands or with the \$7 million 1998 settlement. In an interview with a Cheslatta elder she explains these past and present connections

"reconciliation cannot occur until the underlying causes of colonial domination are addressed" (2015: 269).

of ongoing impacts through her personal experience at Lejac residential school and her memories of her grandfather's experience from the flood:

"He was at the lake when they told him to move in 1952. Grandpa was telling these stories that when they were moving from the lake to go up here that the Indian agents told them to leave, that the wagon wheel trails were being filled with water while they were moving. Where we camped out last week, where you go about an hour and half down the lake, that's where Grandpa's homestead would be. There's nothing left now other than old timber laying around. I wanted to be there when they were coming out in '52, I was trying to think how it would be there because Grandpa said he lived behind the church which is what Alcan burnt down and then when they were told to leave he said that he knew he was never going to come back then and that was the end of old Cheslatta. I wish I was there at that time when old Cheslatta was there to see what they actually went through. I'm still on the healing journey, I go back, then ahead, then back. Yeah life is... hm... I felt like I ... like there was never really a growing up time. Going to residential school, being so angry about that, mom drinking in town and we are all to fend for ourselves again... hm... then coming back and drinking it was like a cycle... I think the flooding had a lot to do with it. People feel empty. That's how Grandpa described it, that empty feeling," (Interview, July 2017).

In an interview with another Cheslatta community member, he talked about the pain of hearing his father's stories from Lejac residential school and the inadequacy of compensation to resolve grievances that resulted from the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement.

"He talked most of the bad stuff that would happen. Pretty messed up. Mhm... just the way they treated people and all that. No human being should get treated like that."

Maia: How do you feel about them burning it [Lejac school] down?

"I'm happy about it. Pretty bad, like... I don't know. I think they should have done something more better than handing out money to people for recovering from that. Trying to buy their whatdya call it... forgiveness. How long does money last? Hmm! Memories last forever. Seeing how he felt and all that, quiet hurt, it still hurt him inside. It was quite a big thing bothering him, I knew he was hiding something that he just didn't want to talk about it. Sometimes he opened up and keep it minimum though. Mmm.... he took his own life four years ago."

(Interview, July 2017)

For meaningful reconciliation, there needs to be recognition of both the colonial past and present in the broader system of land dispossession and political domination (Coulthard 2014). The Cheslatta's experience with flooding waters began in 1952 but continues into the present day and so challenges the restrictive temporal frame that Alcan and BC rely on to advance their position in negotiations. The struggles in the Cheslatta community of drug and alcohol abuse, suicide, depression and feelings of isolation are manifestations of the slow violence of dispossession, and ultimately the structure of settler colonialism. With themes of temporality,

forgiveness and conditions of confidentiality, “reconciliation is appropriated by symbolic gestures” to advance state and industry interests when the conditions that enabled past violence persists in the present (Rigney 2012: 253).

By positioning Cheslatta’s displacement as an isolated flooding event, negotiations are framed as overcoming a historic abuse while leaving the present, harmful structures in place, such as Alcan’s continued ownership of the Nechako River. BC’s current Reconciliation Framework falls short of meaningful justice and resolution because it does not address the system that enabled displacement in the first place, and instead maintains it. Coulthard writes,

“By the state offering statements of regret and apology for harms conceived as occurring in the past, thus off-loading responsibility to address structural injustices that continue to inform our settler-colonial present [...] in doing so can claim that the historical wrong has been righted and further transformation is not needed [...] The optics created by these grand gestures of recognition and reconciliation suggests to the dominant society that we no longer have a legitimate ground to stand on in expressing our grievances” (2014: 155,156).

The condition of forgiveness in these negotiations could mean that the Cheslatta are no longer able to express grievances about ongoing impacts in the future. Because the impacts of displacement in the community are multifarious and insidious, ongoing reconciliation negotiation discussions of displacement and righting wrongs of the past must coincide with the current politics of the land that enabled such violence in the first place.

These sentiments of forgiveness, moving forward and officiating a “break with the past” is a tool of “political legitimization” (Blackburn 2007). Carole Blackburn argues that reconciliation has become conflated with progress away from a tainted past, but fails to acknowledge the ongoing, structural inequality of colonial relationships (Ibid: 635). The ongoing experiences of colonial relationships, asymmetrical power relations, are evident in the negotiations. The trope of reconciliation produces a “reconciliation effect” which is a semblance of understanding and shared common ground (Henderson & Wakeham 2009). Sloan Morgan and Castleden ask, “How can new relationships be upheld in a respectful and mutually beneficial manner when one treaty signatory views obligations as bureaucratic process and another, a commitment that will impact their children and grandchildren, cultural practices, and everyday lives for future generations?” (2018: 329). The ways in which the reconciliation negotiation processes are taking place maintain asymmetrical recognition-based dynamics. This is grounded in the assumption that Aboriginal rights are subordinate to Crown sovereignty. The Framework

states that it does not “establish, recognize, affirm, deny, limit or amend Aboriginal rights” (Section 12.6.b: 10). In part this is to distinguish it from a treaty, which would involve Section 35 and a complicated process of recognizing, limiting, and amending such rights. Additionally, the economic circumstances of the Cheslatta makes them much less powerful in the negotiations and undermines Cheslatta’s capacity for self-determination. The band depends on these negotiations to provide funds and crucial resources for ventures proposed by the Chief and Council to improve community wellness, cultural revitalization and employment. Recognizing these complexities is crucial in dynamics of settler colonialism and in establishing relations of equity, otherwise the negotiations are compromised as they overlook key micro-level injustices and ongoing impacts, while maintaining asymmetrical power relations between the Cheslatta, BC and Alcan.

The Framework for Cheslatta’s reconciliation negotiations focus on economic opportunity for both parties. From the provincial standpoint, these reconciliation negotiations “focus on closing socio-economic gaps that separate Indigenous people from other British Columbians, building a province where all citizens can participate in a prosperous economy” (British Columbia Statement). BC is in a unique political, social and economic position compared to other Canadian provinces because treaties were not made with First Nations in the past, with exceptions only on Vancouver Island and the northeastern corner. This means that unceded aboriginal title exists on the majority of provincial lands. British Columbia’s economy relies on exploiting natural resources, thus without certainty of Aboriginal title there is economic risk for investment by resource companies whose operations depend on Indigenous lands. Critiques of reconciliation politics point out the underlying motive to affirm economic certainty for industry and government involves settling grievances with Indigenous nations through reconciliation settlement packages (Blackburn 2007; Corntassel et al. 2009).

Leanne Simpson writes of this emphasis on increasing economic potential through reconciliation: “although primitive accumulation no longer appears to require the openly violent dispossession of indigenous communities and their entire land and resource base, it does demand that both remain open for exploitation and capitalist development” (2017: 77). A community member who is involved in the negotiating tables said, “There can never be an amount of money to fix what happened, what they’re offering is insulting. There is no remorse, we are over 170

miles apart from each other and the negotiations create even more tension in the community. It's so stressful. Grandpa owns the biggest trap line in BC, but no one uses it anymore, it just never carried on" (Interview, February 2018). In the Framework, Cheslatta stated: "the heart of the territory traditionally used and occupied by the Cheslatta T'en from time immemorial was flooded by the creation of the Nechako reservoir and associated works. These lands remain submerged and they continue in the memory and being of the Cheslatta T'en," and concludes with "Cheslatta is on a journey of healing, celebrating courage, resilience, and reconciliation" (Appendix A, 1;8: 13). Absent from the Framework is the state's responsibility to consider its impact of dispossession in more complex terms than just land loss, but also a "removal of place-based grounded normativities that are crucial elements to a sense of identity, sense of place and community" (Simpson 2017: 43). In an interview with an elder, she spoke about the importance of Cheslatta territory in honoring the memory of her grandfather:

"Grandpa always told us, always go back to your homeland. That's why I go back every year even though I don't like camping now I'm like oooh my bones [laughs] my ankle, my back! But just to go back to the homeland, I get a sense a good feeling, being close to Grandpa, his roots where he was from and where he was happy. He always said I'm not happy up here this isn't my home, I'm happy when I go home he would say. One year I went back, put up a tent up there for him and everything [laughs] we just laughed because he got his sleeping bag and went to sleep under a spruce tree" (Interview, February 2018).

I argue that the connection that Cheslatta community members describe to their traditional territory cannot be adequately recognized by the commodification process in the settlement agreements. These negotiations differ from Treaty negotiations in that they do not call for formal extinguishment of Aboriginal rights to reach an agreement. However, they do seek to further incorporate communities into capitalist production to ensure that the settler state's economic prospects are not threatened by Indigenous sovereignty (Simpson 2017). Taiaiake Alfred, quoted by Coulthard, argues that colonial recognition politics serve the imperatives of capitalist accumulation by appearing to address its colonial history through symbolic acts of redress while "further entrenching in law and practice the real bases of its control" (Coulthard 2014: 155).

Lastly, non-disclosure agreements in Cheslatta's Reconciliation Negotiations have posed a significant challenge to the Chief and Council as well as band members. The fundamental premise of negotiation meetings taking place behind closed doors strained community dynamics, prevented cross-collaboration and sharing of information amongst other First Nations also

involved in Reconciliation Negotiations with the province. In Section 6.1 of the Framework it states:

“The Parties will maintain the negotiations of this Framework Agreement, the Term Sheet, and the Reconciliation and Settlement Agreement as confidential except as necessary for internal communications within each Party and with each Party’s advisors, or as required by law.” The Framework concludes, “The details of the negotiations are confidential but the Parties can share general information on the negotiations” (Appendix D, 5: 17).

The ability to communicate and share information with other First Nations along with band members historically has proved to be a critical tool in navigating and understanding the flaws of Treaty negotiations in Canada (Manuel et. al 2015). The transference and dispersal of information and anecdotal experiences at Treaty tables addressed the lack of knowledge about the treaty process, which empowered communities with awareness and understanding. The non-disclosure, confidential nature of these relatively new Reconciliation Negotiations hinders the ability for dissemination of knowledge and experiences in these processes that could help communities better inform their negotiation proceedings. The NDA also creates potential obstacles for effective governance in the community. The inability for Chief and Council to have transparent communication with band members throughout every phase of these negotiations, challenged band members’ ability to make informed decisions in voting processes and did not allow for full input from members whose lives would be impacted by the negotiations, as well as the lives of future generations.

Non-disclosure agreements are a form of silencing established by the provincial government and evoke hierarchical power dynamics. A community member who is involved in the negotiation meetings, told me: “I hate the negotiations. I hate them, really. It is so hard, every single day not being able to tell people in the community exactly what is happening and what we are working on so people know all that there is to look forward to and so that they can continue to trust the leadership and the work that everyone is doing. And instead it’s endless rumors, gossip and a lack of trust. The meetings are so stressful. I’m just exhausted” (Interview Notes, April 2018). Another community member who is not involved in the negotiations said, “Before, the band office was always packed with people. We used to have big meetings all the time, we all made decisions together. Now it’s just empty and quiet in there, we don’t get to see what’s going on anymore. It’s sad” (Field Notes, April 2018). Several community members expressed frustrations and diminished faith in band politics because of the lack of transparency. One

community member told me, “My dad lived under a spruce tree for a year after the flood. Why don’t I have a seat at the table? My grandbabies will be impacted by the decisions they are making behind these closed doors” (Field Notes, April 2018).

Kim Stanton noted one of the most important aspects of a truth commission is to engage the wider public in a narrative that may form the basis of national reconciliation. Similarly, if these negotiations are to support “reconciliation,” then community engagement is an essential part of the process (2011:49). Stanton wrote of the importance for meaningful reconciliation to “penetrate the collective consciousness of the people,” to enable an engaged, vigorous civil society to hold the structures of settler colonialism accountable (Ibid: 48). How can meaningful reconciliation in the everyday, be achieved and supported with non-disclosure agreements? Irlbacher-Fox, quoted by Glen Coulthard, argues that for meaningful reconciliation there must be a refusal to collaborate in maintaining injustice as the basis of relationship between the state and Indigenous peoples (2014: 156). The underlying agendas of settlement and reconciliation offers, move industry forward and colonialism onward by excusing unjust structures as historical legacies through state-sponsored commemorations and reconciliation. How can the state’s reconciliation discourse in its “depoliticized recovery-based narratives” truly resolve injustice when it remains premised upon relations of power between the state and Indigenous peoples? (Simpson 2017: 49). Reconciliation negotiations risk “ideologically manufacturing a transition from colonial violence to the dustbins of history” and disentangles processes of reconciliation from vital questions of settler colonialism (Coulthard 2014: 108).

The Chief and Council are working hard to address immediate needs expressed by Cheslatta band members. The broader Framework discourse emphasizes healing in the community. The community-based goals in the negotiations were fleshed out in strategic planning meetings in which the Chief and Council worked to bring the 2017 Community Plan to fruition once settlements are reached. During these meetings, the main themes brought up by leadership included: “Goals to reclaim and heal our territory”; “wellness knowledge;” “healing;” “revive our culture, language and tradition;” “language and culture need to be the top priority;” “create a healing-recovery center;” “update housing policy;” “develop community center” (Field Notes, February 2018). The early implementation components of Cheslatta’s Settlement Framework with BC involve “funding to support cultural and heritage initiatives, support

workforce training and education, economic initiatives, potential for short-term salvage timber opportunities and funding to support the implementation of the Framework Agreement” (Framework Section 9.1: 8). At a reconciliation strategy meeting the facilitator hired by Cheslatta, told the Chief and negotiating table, “your people are survivors and you need to do more in the area of culture, language and healing. Need to bring your people along with you” (Field Notes, February 2018). These expressions of healing by the band leadership and hired facilitators are addressing community needs as expressed by band members, however considering the complexity of reconciliation and settler colonialism that is not addressed in these negotiations, it remains uncertain to what extent these negotiations with the province and Alcan could provide resolution and justice.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

When I began this research on how the Cheslatta community experienced forced displacement and dispossession, I anticipated a methodology of thorough memory work to better understand ongoing impacts and ways in which people respond to slow violence. However, I soon realized that my anticipated methodology and expectations upon entering the field mirrored the very temporality of colonialism that I critiqued. Quite quickly, I realized not only did I need to address my settler positionality but also that my methodology needed to address the messy complexity of displacement, slow violence and settler colonialism. I slowed down and focused on being present. I shifted my focus away from a formalized, structured methodology to one that was grounded in community engagement and principles of decolonization. What I learned of Cheslatta's displacement, the multiplicity of moving forward and the complexity of social repair was contextualized from relationships formed over time. Gerald Vizenor suggests rethinking the concept of resilience to a concept of "survivance" as a power equivalent to "dominance," that insists on the creative presence of Indigenous peoples. Survivance names an "active sense of presence over absence" it is the continuance of "stories [that] are renunciations of dominance" (2008: 1). The past and present assertions from various Cheslatta community members and elected leaders demonstrates that the Cheslatta are not simply resilient, they embody and practice survivance. Through active witnessing of everyday efforts at community building, social-repair and listening to the ways in which Cheslatta members grapple with loss and hope, I learned that "survivance" from forced displacement is not linear nor is it motivated by clear concepts of memory.

Alcan's development-forced displacement of the Cheslatta created grounds for uncertainty for the community as they navigated resettlement. And the extractive ideology of British Columbia denied the Cheslatta justice and resolution for over six decades. Yet, for generations, the Cheslatta have worked to retain their identity and remain connected to place through their community relations and memories of their homeland. For the Cheslatta, collective memory is fluid; at times, it is challenged by gaps in intergenerational transmission. A Cheslatta community member who wishes to remain anonymous told me about her hopes for the community:

“I just see my grandbabies and my dad looking over them, the beauty and uniqueness of this place, what we’ve gone through and the vision for the future. Improving the now for future generations and having things in place so future generations don’t have to deal with trauma. The beauty of it and knowing that my dad and great grandfather, Chief Louie they walked the land, you wonder their thoughts and their visions for future generations. I just want healing with the community members and we’re all here for the same thing, which is the future generations,” (Interview, February 2018).

Indigenous scholars Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua write, “We also need a better understanding of the ways in which Aboriginal peoples resist ongoing colonization [...] Within antiracism theory and practice, the question of land as a contested space is seldom taken up” (Lawrence & Dua 2005: 126). I hope this work will contribute to studies concerned with ways that identity, land and memory inform contexts of on-going engagement with colonial processes of displacement and how destruction by way of displacement and altered landscapes is not a complete annihilation of a community but an opportunity for the community to remake the world.

Bibliography

- Assmann, Jan., & Czaplicka, J. 1995. *Collective Memory and Cultural Identity*. New German Critique, *Cultural History/Cultural Studies*. No. 65: 125-133.
- Arvin, M., Tuck, E., & Morrill, A. 2013. Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy. *Feminist Formations* 25(1):8-34.
- Ben-Amos, Dan and Weissberg, Liliane. 1999. *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Billard, Rebecca. 2012. *Returning of the Spirits; an Emotional Day for the Cheslatta Carrier Nation Community*. Lakes District News.
- Blackburn, Carole. 2007. Producing legitimacy: reconciliation and the negotiation of aboriginal rights in Canada. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13(3): 621-638.
- Bonds, A., & Inwood, J. 2016. Beyond white privilege: Geographies of white supremacy and settler colonialism. *Progress in Human Geography* 40(6):715–733.
- Boyer, David S. 1956. "Kitimat--Canada's Aluminum Titan." *National Geographic Magazine*. National Geographic Virtual Library: <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/9P2UA3>
- Bowles, P., & Veltmeyer, Henry. 2014. The answer is still no: voices of pipeline resistance. Halifax and Winnipeg. Fernwood Publishing.
- Buhler, Katherine. 1998. *Come Hell and High Water: The Relocation of the Cheslatta First Nation*. MA Thesis. University of Northern British Columbia.
- Byl, Dick & Mike Robertson. 1992. A Legal Analysis of the Cheslatta Surrender. Burns Lake, BC.: Cheslatta Carrier Nation.
- Coulthard, Glen Sean. 2014. *Red Skin, White Masks*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Connerton, Paul. 2008. Seven Types of forgetting. University of Cambridge. *Memory Studies*. 1(1):59-71.
- Cornthassel, J., Chaw-win-is, & T'lakwadzi. 2009. *Indigenous storytelling, truth-telling, and community approaches to reconciliation* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Christensen, Bev. 1995. *Too good to be true: Alcan's Kemano Completion Project*. British Columbia: Talonbooks.

Dawson, P. E. 2002. The relocation of aboriginal people in Canada, 1952 to 1967: A united nations human rights analysis from a cultural perspective, cultural genocide. PhD Diss., York University, Canada.

Evenden, Matthew. 2015. *Allied Power: Mobilizing Hydro-Electricity During Canada's Second World War*. Ontario: University of Toronto Press.

Field, James. 2010. The Changing Vessel of Memory-Identity and Text in Religion and Cultural Memory by Jan Assmann. Review Essay, *Critical Horizons*, (11):1, 133-147.

Fleming, W.C. 2007. Getting past our myths and stereotypes about Native Americans. *Education Digest*. 1(27):51-57.

Gall, Christopher and Ross Hoffman. 2011. Chapter 7: A research journey documenting Tl'azt'en Nation's ancestral history of Yeko. AIATSIS Research Publications.

Gordillo, Gastón. 2014. *Rubble: The Afterlife of Destruction*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Guernsey, Brenda. 2009. "Un-Layering Landscapes: A Post-Colonial Critique of "wilderness" in Tsimshian Territory, Northern British Columbia." PhD Diss., University of Northern British Columbia, Canada.

Gunn, Brenda L. 2015. Moving Beyond Rhetoric: Working Toward Reconciliation through Self-Determination. *Dalhousie Law Journal* (38)1: 237-270.

Henderson, J., & Wakeham, P. 2009. Colonial reckoning, national reconciliation? Aboriginal peoples and the culture of redress in Canada. *English Studies in Canada*, 35(1):1-26.

Hooper, Craig. 2016. (September 15). Alcan water deal a relic of the past. *Prince George Citizen*.

Hume, Stephen. 2015 (June 10). Reconciliation Confronted by Reality; no Closure. *The Vancouver Sun*.

Hume, Mark. 2011 (October 5). Native band rushes to save grave markers from floodwaters. *Globe and Mail*.

- Irlbacher-Fox, Stephanie. 2014. Traditional Knowledge, co-existence and co-resistance. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* . (3)3: 145-158.
- Larsen, Soren. 2003. Promoting Aboriginal Territoriality through Interethnic Alliances. *Human Organization*. (62) 1:74-84.
- Larsen, Soren. 2004. Place Identity in a Resource-Dependent Area of Northern British Columbia. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. (94)4): 944-960.
- Larsen, Soren. 2006. The Future's Past: Politics of Time and Territory Among Dakelh First Nations in British Columbia. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*. (88) 3:311-321.
- Larsen, S., Johnson, J., & Johnson, Jay T. 2017. *Being Together in Place: Indigenous Coexistence in a More Than Human World*. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Lawrence, B., & Dua, E. 2005. Decolonizing Antiracism. *Social Justice* 32(4):120-143.
- Lawton, F. L. 1953. The Kemano-Kitimat Hydro-electric Power Development. *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*. 101(4912):887-909.
- Manuel, A., Derrickson, R., & Derrickson, Grand Chief Ronald M. 2015. *Unsettling Canada: A National Wake-Up Call*. Toronto: Between the Lines.
- Nienow, Flavio. 2015. (June 25). Cheslatta Carrier Nation wants solution for flooding. *Burns Lake District News*.
- Neuberger, Richard L. 1953. "KITIMAT: COLOSSUS OF THE NORTHWEST." *Harper's Magazine*: 56. *ProQuest*. Web. 3 Nov. 2018
- Nixon, Rob. 2013. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press.
- Oliver-Smith, Anthony. 2010. *Defying Displacement: Grassroots Resistance and the Critique of Development*. University of Texas Press.
- Olick, J. 2007. *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility*. New York: Routledge.

Parr, Joy. 2010. *Sensing Changes, Technologies, Environments and the Everyday*. British Columbia: UBC Press.

Peyton, Jonathon. 2017. *Unbuilt Environments: tracing postwar development in northwest British Columbia*. British Columbia: UBC Press.

Preston, J. 2013. Neoliberal settler colonialism, Canada and the tar sands. *Race & Class*. (55)2: 42–59.

Riano-Alcala, Pilar. 2000. *Dwellers of Memory: An Ethnography of Place, Memory and Violence in Medellin, Colombia*. PhD Diss., University of British Columbia, Canada.

Riano-Alcala, Pilar. 2015. Emplaced Witnessing: Commemorative practices among the Wayuu in the Upper Guajira. *Memory Studies*. (8)3: 282-297.

Robertson, Mike. 1992. *The Story of the Surrender of the Cheslatta Reserves on April 21, 1952*. Grassy Plains: Cheslatta Band.

Robertson, Mike. 1982 *Interviews and Statements; Individual Losses Incurred by Cheslatta Band Members Due to the Surrender of the Cheslatta Reserves to Alcan in 1952*. Prince George B.C. Cheslatta Carrier Nation, 1982.

- 1983/84 Cheslatta Interviews. Prince George B.C., Cheslatta Carrier Nation, 1983.

Rigney, Ann. 2012. Reconciliation and Remembering: (how) does it work? Utrecht University, the Netherlands. *Memory Studies* (5)3:251-258.

Sheedy, Bruce. 2005. *Analysis of a Cold Water Release Facility in the Nechako Reservoir*. Burnaby, BC: Simon Fraser University Library.

Morgan, Sloan. & Castleden, H. 2018. “This Is Going to Affect Our Lives”: Exploring Huu-ay-aht First Nations, the Government of Canada and British Columbia’s New Relationship Through the Implementation of the Maa-nulth Treaty. *Canadian Journal of Law and Society*. (33)3:309-334.

Stoler, Ann Laura. 2008. *Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination*. North Carolina: Duke University Press.

Smith, Sidonie. 1992. *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women’s Autobiography*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

- Simpson, Betasamosake Leanne. 2014. Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*. (3)3:1-25.
- Simpson, Betasamosake Leanne. 2017. *As We Have Always Done*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Simpson, Bob. 1993. Selling the River: The Kemano Completion Project on BC's Nechako River is a Classic Case of Megaproject Madness, Where Massive Investments must Generate Massive Returns, at the Expense of the Environment and Local Communities. *Earthkeeper*.
- Sutherland, R. (2001). The oolichan fishery of northern British Columbia Nass River. *BC Historical News*. 34(3): 8.
- Stanton, K. 2011. Canada's truth and reconciliation commission: Settling the past? *International Indigenous Policy Journal*. (2)3: 1-21.
- Temper, Leah. 2019. Blocking Pipelines, Unsettling Environmental Justice: From Rights of Nature to Responsibility to Territory. *Local Environment* (24)2: 94–112.
- Vizenor, Gerald. 2008. *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Willow, Anna J. 2016. Indigenous ExtrACTIVISM in Boreal Canada: Colonial Legacies, Contemporary Struggles and Sovereign Futures. *Humanities*. 5(3): 55.
- Windsor, J. E., and J. A. Mcvey. 2005. Annihilation of Both Place and Sense of Place: The Experience of the Cheslatta T'En Canadian First Nation within the Context of Large-Scale Environmental Projects. *The Geographical Journal*. (2)171: 146–165.
- Wolfe, Patrick. 2006. Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native. *Journal of Genocide Research*. (8)4: 387-409.
- "Where's the Cold-Water Money?" Feb 27 2008. *Omineca Express*.
- "Centuries Old Nechako River Erased For B.C. Aluminum." *The Globe and Mail* (1936-Current) Oct 10 1952: 1.

Framework for Negotiation of the Reconciliation and Settlement Agreement. 2016. Cheslatta Carrier Nation and British Columbia. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/consulting-with-first-nations/agreements/cheslatta_framework_public_version_20160805.pdf Date Accessed: 3/8/2018

Interim Reconciliation Agreement. 2019. Cheslatta Carrier Nation and British Columbia. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/consulting-with-first-nations/agreements/cheslatta_interim_reconciliation_agreement_-_executed_-_20190328.pdf Date Accessed: 5/1/2019

BC/Alcan 1997 Agreement. https://www.neef.ca/uploads/library/5960_BC-Alcan1997_SettlementAgreement.pdf Date Accessed: 1/8/2018