

Everyday Kin (in the) Making: Spatial and Relational Obligations in Treaty

Eight Territory

by

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Abstract

This project considers the possibility of a relational turn in Indigenous studies, and Indigenous literary studies specifically, toward the study and practice of everyday kinship. This turn does not propose the complete abdication of larger, macro-political projects, but rather suggests we need to be attentive to both macro- and micropolitical projects in tandem, while simultaneously outlining how the micropolitical as a site of analysis in Indigenous communities often receives little sustained interest or engagement from wider academic circles (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous), in comparison to large-scale Indigenous cultural and political issues. Scholars studying forms of Indigenous cultural production (or settler cultural production about/addressing Indigenous peoples) and Indigenous communities have yet to substantively consider how a focus on everyday life and kinship can help outline, navigate, and denaturalize the colonial dimensions and parameters of what is currently called Canada. This dissertation takes Treaty Eight as its immediate intellectual, spatial, and ecological context, and examines three sites of analysis: a small-town archive that makes settler colonial claims to space and in the process erases Indigenous histories; a hazardous waste treatment centre that eradicates Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world, and in the process damages relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, as well as with other-than-human beings; and the creative and critical writing of Treaty Eight poet Billy-Ray Belcourt, whose poetry outlines the harmful effects of imposed masculinities and the gender binary, and gestures to modes of existing otherwise. Each of these sites contain intimate relationships and complex lived realities that are rarely given sustained attention in Indigenous studies, even as they are arguably the fabric of everyday lives within the shared geography of Treaty Eight territory. Thus, I maintain that a

rigorous engagement with the shared geographies we inhabit, as well as the enmeshed and entangled ways we relate to one another other, is not only necessary, but vital if we are going to address not only the intimate, everyday symptoms of colonial injustice, but also the root causes of harm reproduced and maintained by settler colonialism.

Lay Summary

The recent focus of Indigenous studies scholarship has been on large-scale political movements, oftentimes at the expense of the intimate, entangled ways we relate and share geographies with one another (Indigenous peoples, settlers, other-than-human kin). This dissertation argues that a renewed engagement with the everyday might enable the development of more just relations, as well as more ethical engagements with diverse knowledges and ways of being in the world. If we do not contend with the daily machinations of settler colonialism, then the current injustices done to Indigenous peoples by settlers will continue well into the future, and be reproduced within our own communities (if they have not been already). Therefore, this dissertation explores the challenges of transforming our everyday kinship obligations, and investigates the potential of establishing more equitable relations by examining the knowledge systems we produce, the relations we cultivate, and the communities we inhabit.

Preface

This dissertation is composed of original and independent work by the author. Chapter Three, “Nikîkwân: Contesting Settler Colonial Archives through Indigenous Oral History” was published under the same name in 2016 in *Canadian Literature*. Portions of Chapter Four, “Kamâyitôtamihk: Reconfiguring Kinship Practices in Treaty Eight Territory,” were published in a book chapter in the collection *Biopolitical Disaster* under the name, “‘Of course they count, but not right now’: Regulating Precarity in Lee Maracle’s *Ravensong* and *Celia’s Song*.” Finally, portions of both Chapter One (the Introduction) and Chapter Six (the Conclusion) will be published in “‘In Search of Our Better Selves’: Totem Transfer Narratives and Indigenous Futurities” in *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 42.1 (Forthcoming). Where necessary, permission has been received to reproduce these works here.

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Dedication

for nikâwiy, wapisewsi, & nîcimos

Chapter 1: Tawâw: Introduction

This project begins with failure. I started conceptualizing this dissertation as one focused on urban Indigeneity in general, and I had intended to address this topic through the notion of “ruins” in particular. However, throughout my reading during the dissertation process, I decided that a deficit-oriented/damage-centered reading of Indigenous communities and ruination was not how I wanted this project to proceed, and instead wanted my focus to be on something much more generative. Although this shift in my orientation developed over time, the strongest impetus for change came from attending two Canadian literature conferences in Toronto in the summer of 2017 – in a city that is arguably the pinnacle of what people think of as Canada, and during the year of Canada’s 150th birthday. After presenting on a panel at a conference that overwhelmingly presented Indigenous peoples in city spaces as mired in damage or ruin, I did not want the research I was currently conducting to reproduce the same tropes or conceptions of urban Indigeneity. Further, I recognized that, in endeavouring to counter those narratives, that the audience of this project would be predominantly white settlers as opposed to the Indigenous peoples to which I had always intended to write.¹ Ultimately, what I originally wanted to highlight in my project, and caution against, is the tendency for damage-centered and depoliticized narratives about urban Indigenous peoples to predominate in these academic

¹ These categories of “settler,” “Indigenous,” and “white or whiteness” are capacious and complex, with some terms requiring a chapter or dissertation in and of themselves. When I refer to Indigenous peoples, I am speaking to peoples autochthonous to a territory or geography, usually within the context of what is currently called North America or Turtle Island (while recognizing that “Indigenous peoples” can be used in a global sense as well) (Vowel, 2016). For “settler” and “white(ness),” I am referring to a structural position (mediated through settler colonialism) that situates (predominantly white) settlers in a hierarchical position “above” Indigenous peoples (Snelgrove, Dhamoon, Cornthassel, 2014). While I acknowledge all these categories are admittedly broad and homogenizing, and have great differences among, between, and within them, I have deployed these terms here for the sake of readability and to gesture to the differential power relations at work in settler colonial nation-states.

contexts, largely for the consumption of well-meaning, white settlers (Tuck, 2009). While it is certainly the case that at times Indigenous peoples ourselves may produce these narratives, I would argue that the limited set of imaginaries that are palatable for settler consumption, and thus, supported by white literary circles, ultimately creates a feedback loop that fosters and supports particular kinds of Indigenous cultural production over others. Specifically, I wanted to address how, in their engagements with urban Indigeneity, (predominantly non-Indigenous) literary studies scholars receive and read Indigenous texts in narrow and damage-centered ways that foreclose on the texts' rich complexity and generative political potential. This tendency is something I will explore further in other/future work, but my primary concern with *this project* is to broadly sketch how diverse and layered Indigenous narratives and other forms of cultural production depict or engage with the intimate, everyday acts of violence(s) inflicted by settler colonialism, and how these come to have a profound effect on kinship relations in a Treaty Eight context.

This shift in focus for the project came from another place as well, which was the deep desire to write about home, Wapiseewsiipi (Swan River First Nation). Home is located in Treaty Eight territory, and it is filled with communities that are vital, agential, mobile, embodied, and relational, and who are constantly moving through, around, and within ancestral, active, and storied geographies. Treaty Eight territory, ultimately, is comprised of several spaces, what Smith and Stenning (2006) refer to as “nested geographies,” including the geography of the body, the family and home, the community and/or nation, waterways, the territory itself, among many other things. Water is paramount here as well, as my community, and many others in proximity and relation to it, are within the Swan Hills Valley and near the Lesser Slave Lake, two sources of material and spiritual sustenance as well as long-standing sites of belonging.

Beyond this, my home territory is also imbued with the spirit of our ancestors and the cosmologies they carry with and within them, and which manifest in the open skies above Treaty Eight askîy (land) and in its waterways. Thus, even as I strategically employ the framing of Treaty Eight in an effort to bound this study, the multi-layered living geographies that operate within these colonially imposed borders cannot be contained by them; indeed, they preceded and continue to consistently exceed and challenge colonial cartographic conventions.

Ultimately, I decided that in order to write to and for Indigenous peoples, if only my community, that I would have to defer my writing on urban Indigenous issues and focus on my own community and the surrounding areas. This desire came from the challenge or tension of having to translate between what we do in academia and the everyday experiences of my family. The support of my immediate and extended family, as well as support from my nation, had gotten me through university, and I hoped that the teachings I was learning could have some use back home. More specifically, I wanted to see how or if some of the popular discourses in Indigenous studies were (or were not) being addressed by or about my community of Swan River First Nation or Treaty Eight more broadly, either historically or in the contemporary moment. This process led me to consult and write about a variety of texts and phenomena that appeared much more pertinent to not only me in my present studies, but also to my wider communities, and most of the texts and issues I had encountered dealt with, or were troubled by, notions of the everyday and kinship and how they responded (or did not) to processes of settler colonialism.

Settler colonialism, as defined by Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard, is a process “characterized by a particular form of *domination*; that is, it is a relationship where power – in this case, interrelated discursive and nondiscursive facets of economic, gendered, racial, and state power – has been structured into a relatively secure or sedimented set of

hierarchical social relations that continue to facilitate the dispossession of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self determining authority” (6-7, italics in original). Mi’kmaw scholar Bonita Lawrence (2003) has outlined how one of the many technologies of settler colonialism operationalized to expand and secure settlement in Canada was “the deliberate introduction of devastating diseases” (7).² Of course, there are numerous ways in which settler colonialism has functioned to attempt to shore up settlement for non-Indigenous peoples, including, but not limited to, the one-sided and false interpretations of treaties as land transactions, to forced removal and imprisonment on reserves, to the residential school system, to the legislated removal of Indigenous identity through policies of (dis)enfranchisement, among many other things (Starblanket and Hunt, 2018).

Scholarship on settler colonialism has been influenced by the work of Patrick Wolfe, who has stated that “settler colonialism is inherently eliminatory” (17). Not only is eliminatory logic motivated by the desire to access and expropriate Indigenous lands, but it also actively creates (and re-creates) what Wolfe and others have described as “colonial legalities.” Thus, the techniques of settler colonialism are always modulating, always in relation to peoples and lands, and can encompass direct acts of violence (displacement, starvation, death), but also more nefarious or insidious means of dispossession. As Coulthard notes with regard to contemporary modes of state-sponsored reconciliation, settler colonial responses to Indigenous assertions of self-determination may result in “a ‘pacifying discourse’ that functions to assuage settler guilt,

² In addition to Indigenous peoples having no natural immunity to these newly (and purposefully) introduced diseases, where relief remedies were possible, such as smallpox vaccination, Canadian officials often withheld them. Similar conditions still exist in reserve communities, with one prominent recent example being Health Canada sending body bags to reserves potentially dealing with H1N1, instead of sending medicines or vaccinations (“Ottawa sends body bags to Manitoba reserves,” n.p.).

on the one hand, and absolve the federal government's responsibility to transform the colonial relationship between Canada and Indigenous nations, on the other" (127). Indeed, it is these more intimate, "quiet" forms of everyday settler colonialism with which this project is preoccupied. While these forms of violence are also "direct" in their results or effects, it is the oftentimes delayed and imperceptible violences that subtend these more explosive or "headline-grabbing" forms of catastrophic physical violence to which I want to attend. This focus is to address, in the words of Tanana Athabascan scholar Dian Million, one of colonialism's "strongest defense[s]: 'silence'" (58).

PROJECT BREAKDOWN

This project is at once a literary project, in the sense that it reads particular texts closely (whether these be archival, poetic, mass media, or geographic), but also one that traverses disciplinary boundaries. I have done this intentionally to show the breadth of political, spatial, and cultural production in Treaty Eight territory, an area that is routinely thought of as a place of intense resource extraction (especially in terms of the Tar Sands) and little else. In this sense, my chosen materials and methodological approaches to this dissertation were determined by the extent to which they enabled me to examine, understand, and engage the Treaty Eight context, rather than the other way around. What I hope this project will do or accomplish is show the complexity, diversity, and creativity of Indigenous voices in the territories of Treaty Eight, and how they impress upon or interrupt dominant narratives regarding history, the archive, the landscape, and ways of being in the world. Following Lisa Brooks (Abenaki), as she outlines in her book *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast*, rather "than trac[e] a single argument and forming agreement," I invite readers to "feel free to interact, deliberate, and

grapple with the images and ideas raised herein, stopping at the ends of quotations, sections, and chapters to contemplate the connections between them” (xxv). This invitation extends to the lands of Treaty Eight themselves, since, as Winona Wheeler (Cree) reminds us, the “land is mnemonic, it has its own set of memories,” and when “people go out on the land it nudges or reminds them” of its presence (55). In a sense, then, what I am suggesting is that the landscape itself is literature, a rich and complex text bursting with geographical, political, and historical contexts, insights, and memories, and as such should be read accordingly. As Margery Fee writes, “Indigenous storytellers describe the land as speaking, as telling its own stories in every rock, stream, and headland” (*Literary Land Claims* 7). Lisa Brooks has said as much in another one of her texts, *Our Beloved Kin*, wherein she writes that the “land itself is an archive that demands interpretation,” and I have attempted to do this throughout this project (13). If “the landscape does not simply function as a decorative background,” then I want to examine what influences the landscape has on our reading practices, how the landscape itself can be read, how the land is an agential subject and relation that generates meaning, and how the land is the site of production of other texts to be engaged with and read in turn (McKittrick xxii-xxiii).

It is not my intention, however, to conflate Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Literary studies; rather, I see both disciplines speaking to and through one another. Further, the issues that arise in Indigenous studies also often manifest in Indigenous Literary studies, with Indigenous Literary studies engaging with them through a variety of different narrative voices, actors, and perspectives, often within one work, which may leave room for a variety of interpretive lenses on an issue within one text. While both fields are certainly distinct in their handling of particular issues important to Indigenous peoples and communities, the overlap between the two is significant: so while I am attentive to them being two discrete fields of study, they do overlap

and tackle similar issues, and therefore my thinking oscillates between the two fields, with an eye to the way that Indigenous literary studies in particular offers imaginative horizons often times not present in the statistical, legalistic, and/or policy analyses present/dominant in Indigenous studies. Further, just as Indigenous studies has been at times (somewhat by necessity) concerned with speaking back to the white-dominated academy as a whole, Indigenous literary studies has also been at times (somewhat by necessity) concerned with speaking back to the white-dominated field of literary studies. The demands that are placed on these two fields of study by virtue of their existence within settler colonial institutions at times negatively impact their orienting imaginaries, and may have redirected energy that might have otherwise been spent on fostering more generative conversations between them.³

Following this introduction (Chapter 1), in Chapter Two I outline three areas of study that are integral to this project: Everyday Life theory, Kinship studies, and Treaty Eight territory. I decided to wed the fields of Everyday Life theory and Kinship studies to address the immediate and intimate concerns that I was interested in addressing but that would also have some effect on my (and potentially others') community. A focus on Everyday Life theory, I contend, provides an avenue to speak to issues that sometimes are labelled as inconsequential or an afterthought to the broader concerns of Indigenous studies (e.g., land, jurisdiction, court cases, etc.). While I do think these issues are important, and are just as much within the purview of Everyday Life theory, they sometimes eclipse or foreclose on our ability to discuss the intimate violences and daily issues that happen in our relatives' kitchens or living rooms. Moreover, sometimes the

³ While there is much to be said about the differences between the discursive categories of "field" and "discipline," this conversation is beyond the purview of this project. I use "discipline" and "field" interchangeably to avoid repetition and to aid and facilitate in the "readability" of this project.

everyday can be cast as a distraction from these larger issues, and in so doing, community members might be able to dismiss daily concerns as unimportant to larger community goals and in the process inculcate themselves from critique or being held accountable (Nixon, “#MeToo and the Secrets Indigenous Women Keep,” n.p). An everyday relational approach to Indigenous scholarship, according to Leanne Simpson, “means a rebellious transformation in how we conduct research, whom we cite as experts, and how our thinking is framed and ultimately takes place” (Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 52). Simpson continues that she is not interested in “center[ing] [Indigenous] resurgence around masculinity, even critical masculinity,” but rather she is more “interested in working with all genders and ages to build nationhoods that refuse to replicate heteropatriarchy in all forms” (Simpson, 52). This desire not to centre masculinities, or men in general, stems from Simpson's recognition that historically, and in the contemporary moment, Indigenous “[m]en working on land and political issues are positioned as theorists and leaders,” while Indigenous “[w]omen working on child welfare issues or gender violence are marginalized and then dismissed and ignored as Indigenous feminists or community organizers” (Simpson, 53). In a sense, then, this project centres these marginalized, dismissed, and ignored voices, rather than the oft-cited, oft-centred masculinist research of Indigenous men “on the land” dealing with “political issues” (the common implication here being that the issues Indigenous women, girls, queer, and Two-spirit peoples partake in are “not political,” “not political enough,” or outside the putative interests of Indigenous studies proper).

Ultimately, to scholars like Leanne Simpson, Sarah Hunt and others, Indigenous peoples’ critical and literary engagements with the “everyday” and the primacy of our relational obligations receive little sustained interest or engagement from wider academic circles, compared to issues like treaty interpretation or issues relating to land-tenure. This economy of

attention and engagement is highly gendered. It often favors masculinist conceptualizations of the political, and relies on the labor of Indigenous women, queer, and Two-spirit peoples to both nurture and theorize everyday relations, even as it values this labor less than other forms of Indigenous political action and knowledge production. This everydayness, and being accountable to others, also dovetails with the study of kinship. Kinship is what is enacted, sustained, maintained, troubled, and/or developed in these intimate spaces – it is the articulation of all of the larger issues discussed above but through our relations and the prism of how we relate to one another. If we practice bad kinship, then ultimately those broader concerns listed above (the land, jurisdiction, etc.) will undoubtedly be affected, as our kin may choose to engage in relational processes that hurt themselves, their communities, and their other-than-human relations, including the land itself. Finally, I locate these two fields of study within the territory of Treaty Eight, as it is an illustrative microcosm of how these methodological orientations can intersect and be illuminative for/in other contexts. Treaty Eight, one of the largest of the numbered treaties, covers vast areas of land and bodies of water, including three provinces and a territory, and is an exemplar for how it contains practices of kinship and concerns that crop up in the everyday. Chapter Two, then, will articulate how these three areas of study intersect, and will provide an interpretative lens of how to engage with the chapters that follow.

Then, in Chapter Three, *Nikikîwân: Contesting Settler Colonial Archives through Indigenous Oral History*, I seek to unsettle and contest the role of the small-town archive in the production of local knowledges, specifically the ways in which these archives conflict with the narratives told by Indigenous elders in surrounding reserve communities. I re-read my grandmother's account of her displacement from the "Swan River Settlement" and from the township that would eventually become to be known as Kinuso, Alberta (Treaty Eight territory).

I situate my grandmother’s narrative against local history texts, specifically *Sodbusters: A History of Kinuso and Swan River Settlement*, to locate how family and colonial histories intersect and are embodied by community members of the Swan River First Nation. My account begins with a detailing of the life of my great-grandfather, August Sound, and how the policies of the Indian Act would come to have a profound effect on him and his descendants. I plot the historical trajectory of my family, or, more specifically, the historical trajectories of my grandmother and great-grandparents to demonstrate how personal archives can illuminate the processes of settler colonialism in detailed and nuanced ways, and how these personal histories can contest the dominant narratives propagated by white settler colonial imaginaries. The form of this chapter is an inter-weaving of academic texts and theories with the oral and experiential knowledge of my grandmother, with the “narrative history” of my grandmother serving as the primary text. This chapter illuminates the everydayness of settler colonialism (its quotidian machinations), while addressing how the broader structures of colonization set up the scaffolding of elision(s) necessary for colonial regimes to assert claims to Indigenous geographies (whether that is through direct violence, harmful policies, or narratives that naturalize settler replacement). I am interested in how this scaffolding makes room for and allows repetitive, iterative acts of colonialism to shore up settler legitimacy or claims to spaces. These daily acts, whether they are as small as absences in archival records, or well-organized and intentional silences around governmental policies surrounding supposedly “small” tracts of land and waterways, sediment over time — they become reified not only within the broader narrative of Canada and its settler colonial apparatuses, but also in the imaginaries of its citizens.

Chapter Four of the dissertation is entitled, *Ka mâyitôtamihk: Reconfiguring Kinship Practices in Treaty Eight Territory*. In *Sacrifice Zones* (2012), Steve Lerner outlines the ways in

which the environmental health, safety, and sustainability of low-income, minority, and Indigenous lands and populations are consistently compromised through disproportionate exposure to harmful toxins in the name of protecting more affluent, predominantly white communities. In this chapter, I outline how the creation of the Swan Hills (Waste) Treatment Centre (SHTC) has rendered my community of Swan River First Nation, as well as other communities in the Treaty Eight area, as “sacrifice zones,” through damaging local ecosystems and threatening our ability to engage in hunting, fishing, and other land-based activities. By consulting literature and criticism on environmental justice and racism, as well as the testimonies of Indigenous communities through archival documents such as personal narratives and newspaper clippings, I chart the many ways that the establishment and continued existence of the SHTC signals multiple lost opportunities to create alliances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Further, while the territories of Treaty Eight have become sites of continued protest after the creation of the Treatment Centre, I gesture also to the strained kinship relations signified by the absence of solidarities within and between Indigenous communities, and how this relates to unsuccessful attempts to contest the initial building and continued maintenance of the SHTC. This chapter weaves academic texts and theories, and popular media/print culture such as newspapers, with the oral and experiential knowledge of members of the Swan River, Sucker Creek, and Driftpile Cree Nations. In this chapter, everyday harmful acts operate by way of slow violence (harmful effects distributed over time). Resource extraction/development mega-projects are almost always sites of elision and silence, with the SHTC serving as a salient example. This chapter, then, engages with and identifies these silences in mainstream media, and how the land (including lakes and rivers) itself bears the brunt of the negative impacts of resource development and makes manifest these elisions. Although these two sites of analysis

may not be viewed as literature proper, this chapter operates under the assumption that popular media (newspaper articles, *et cetera*) and collective writings are not only worthwhile sites of analysis, but they are also forms of literature. Further, as mentioned above, I also argue that the landscape can be viewed as literature as it has embedded within its crust/earth/dirt stories and narratives, and the continued and misguided poisoning of these stories not only affects our communities and territories in the contemporary moment, but also future generations of humans and other-than-human kin.

In Chapter Five, I look to the work of Treaty Eight queer poet Billy-Ray Belcourt (Cree), and how the writing he does imagines new worlds not circumscribed by the everyday violences (especially enforced masculinity) that may currently proliferate within Indigenous communities. Specifically, for this chapter, I engage with Belcourt's critical work as well as his debut poetry collection, *This Wound is a World*, both of which are set in or examine issues situated in Treaty Eight territory. I investigate the rupturing of familial kinship relations in Belcourt's texts, and how these fissures radiate outwards and structure social relations within Indigenous communities more broadly. Further, in Belcourt's work, I examine how the imposition of toxic masculinity, or masculinity itself, results in a breach of kinship obligations and how Belcourt looks to worlds to come, especially in embodied practices/acts, to mitigate or mediate these breaches of kinship. Belcourt's oeuvre is ultimately an exercise in world-building or worlding, in calling forth an imaginative space that exceeds or supersedes a world that, as he writes, "isn't good for most of us" (*This Wound*, 8).⁴ This work is important in how it illustrates Indigenous studies' constitutive

⁴ "Worlding," as a concept, is also found in the writings of theorists like Martin Heidegger (1927) and Gayatri Spivak (1985), though the contexts they are writing about and within are different than that of Belcourt.

disavowals, as well as how it illuminates the tensions of affective terrains and kinship relations overdetermined by violent logics or imaginaries.

Finally, in Chapter Six, the conclusion of the dissertation, I not only review the main themes and arguments present in this project, but I also gesture to my future work, which will be preoccupied with issues specific to urban Indigenous communities and a concept I am working through that I have deemed “benevolent elision.” Expanding on the theories of everyday kinship relations I have outlined in this project, my future studies will look to Indigenous texts, as well as non-Indigenous depictions of Indigenous communities and spaces, to address fraught representations of Indigeneity in contested geographies in what is currently called Canada. I gesture to what an ethical urban Indigenous literary framework might look like, and how Indigenous literary studies scholars might get there. I also outline how settler colonial countries like Canada, and the narratives they propagate, engage in acts of erasure of Indigenous collectivities, often in the service of benevolently including one Indigenous person in an attempt to appear progressive. It is my hope that in writing about kinship relations and the everyday in this project, that I will be able to engage with questions of urban Indigeneity and narratives of erasure in a manner that is not only ethical, but in a way that also circumvents or avoids the narrow possibilities that dominate readings currently in fashion within Indigenous literary studies more broadly.

In a sense, then, this project and its sites of analysis will more or less progress in a spatial and temporal sense: Chapter 3 deals with an archival text produced in the late 1970s, and will focus primarily on my home community; the fourth chapter deals with the construction of a Waste Treatment Plant in the Swan Hills Valley in the 1980s and 1990s, still in operation today, affecting not only my community but also surrounding reserve communities; and the fifth

chapter engages with the work of Billy-Ray Belcourt, especially his 2018 book of poetry *This Wound is a World*, and concerns not only Treaty Eight territory more generally, but also “the worlds” that Indigenous life, theory, and writing are housed within and create – or could create – in a broader North American (and, in some cases, global) context.

Chapter 2: Kinship and Everyday Life in Treaty Eight

“Like my kin before me, I would argue that a project of Indigenous resurgence is nothing, is inanimate, without an ethics of love and kinship as a guiding principle”

—Lindsay Nixon (Cree-Métis-Saulteaux), “sâkihito-maskihkiy acâhkosiwikamikohk”

“[W]hat would happen if every time an Indigenous woman had her personal boundaries crossed without consent, we were moved to act in the same way as we’ve seen to the threat of a pipeline in our territories...”

—Sarah Hunt (Kwagiulth), “Violence, Law and the Everyday Politics of Recognition”

In this chapter, I outline the three bodies of literature that inform my analysis in this dissertation: Treaty Eight, kinship, and theories of “the everyday.” These three fields of examination provide a generative lens through which to examine settler colonialism, inter- and intra- community dynamics, Indigenous epistemologies and cosmologies, gender, and a whole host of issues pertinent to Indigenous studies and Indigenous peoples. I also engage with these three topics as they are issues that do not receive as much attention compared to largescale analyses on issues like land tenure, discourses about state-sponsored initiatives like “Reconciliation,” and international agreements like the United Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). These fields prompt us to rethink how we are enacting relations in the everyday, while also offering new openings for how we approach macropolitical projects. Finally, I have located these issues in Treaty Eight not only because this is the context I am most familiar with and where I am from, but also because as a site of analysis, it does not receive as

much attention as other Alberta-centric provincial treaties such as Treaty Six, Treaty Seven, or other areas in the North West of Canada.⁵ In setting my analysis in Treaty Eight lands, I hope to demonstrate that it is a rich and vital geography, worthy of sustained study, and an indicative case of the manifestation of kinship relations (or the lack thereof, in some instances) in everyday life.

TREATY EIGHT

The numbered treaties were signed between the periods of 1871 to 1921. As the Canadian state desired to expand northward and westward to accumulate more resources and land for settlement, the treaties were viewed as a tangible, and in some ways diplomatic, means for the Canadian government to achieve this access. Moreover, the move to accumulate lands through acts of “diplomacy” or treaty came on the heels of the Northwest Rebellion of 1869, with some viewing the numbered treaties as a means by which the state could expropriate lands under less violent measures while simultaneously saving face or looking “morally” or “ethically” sound in the process (Andersen, 2014; Dickason and Newbigging, 2015). The stipulations, measures, and agreements in all treaties differ to some degree, and this is in large part where most of the confusion and discrepancies behind and about treaties lie – not to mention the larger, more

⁵ For proof of this relative lack of engagement with Treaty Eight, one need only engage with texts that purport to be about the prairies or plains more broadly, and yet have little reference to Treaty Eight specifically. An example of this would be James Daschuk’s (2013) award-winning book *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life*, which discusses the prairies at-length, but only has one reference to Treaty Eight in its index, compared to over ten each for Treaty Six and Seven. For a book that is described as “required reading for all Canadians” on its backcover, it would seem that very little engagement with Treaty Eight is a requirement for existing in what is currently Canada, despite its relative size and its integral part in Canada’s settler colonial capitalist economy.

epistemological problems between how settlers and Indigenous peoples viewed and continue to view the ultimate ends of treaty.

Predominantly, the narrative from settler perspectives, both historically and in the present, has ultimately viewed the treaty as a form of land transaction. Indeed, according to Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, treaties “[a]t their base ... were land surrenders on a huge scale” (n.p.). Even more sympathetic, progressive engagements with the treaty process still ultimately describe it as “[t]he transfer of lands” (174), or “surrenders” (163), as do Olive Patricia Dickason (Métis) and William Newbigging in *A Concise History of Canada’s First Nations* (2015). Perhaps the most well-known documenter of the putative cessation of Indigenous lands is Alexander Morris, writer of the often re-printed and amended *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North West Territories* (1880). In this text, Morris can be taken as an exemplar of how settlers viewed and ultimately solidified the perspective of treaties as a bequeathing of lands from one entity (Indigenous peoples) to another (the Canadian state). Morris amply quotes Superintendent-Generals of Indian Affairs and their various compiled reports, with one example being William B. Robinson’s declaration: “... and I trust that the terms on which I succeeded in obtaining the surrender of all the lands in question, with the exception of some small reservations made by the Indians, may be considered satisfactory” (qtd. in Morris, 17).

And yet this interpretation of the intent of treaties exists in contradistinction to those provided by Indigenous elders throughout the territories of the numbered treaties. Harold Cardinal and Walter Hildebrandt (2000), in *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream is that Our Peoples Will One Day be Clearly Recognized as Nations*, emphasize and implore for an “understanding of the foundational concepts” of treaties, one that foregrounds that “sharing the

land so that all benefit, as well as the related doctrines that describe the right to a livelihood for all peoples, is crucial if we are to build positive, forward-looking relationships based on the treaties” (viii). Quoting Elder Kay Thompson from Treaty Four territory, they continue to declare emphatically that “the Indians did not surrender land” (63). Following this, Walter Hildebrandt has elsewhere written, along with Dorothy First Rider and Sarah Carter (1996), that Indigenous communities were “unanimous in their understanding that the treaty signified that they were willing to share the land with the newcomers, not that they had agreed to sell or to ‘cede, release and surrender’ it” – a common claim put forth by colonial authorities at the time and to this day (125). These accounts are corroborated by Indigenous scholars, writers, and artists as well, with some asserting that the treaties provide a framework for how to exist together ethically in a shared geography (Craft, 2016; Ladner, 2003; Little Bear, 1986; Venne, 1997), and others outlining the historical use of treaties as a form of diplomacy and governance between Indigenous nations and communities, one that extends to present day relations with settlers and non-Indigenous peoples (Borrows, 2002; L. Simpson, 2008; Youngblood Henderson, 2002).⁶

However, for my purposes with this project, I look specifically at the territory of Treaty Eight, established in 1899. Here I want to emphasize that this project is not one concerned specifically with treaty interpretation or implementation, though I do acknowledge and engage with scholarship focused on these issues. Rather, what I am interested in is Treaty Eight as an

⁶ In addition to the Indigenous scholars cited here, there are also settler scholars who argue for a more comprehensive understanding of treaties and call for an engagement with Indigenous understandings of treaties as well, including, but not limited to, the following: Michael Asch. *On Being Here To Stay: Treaties and Aboriginal Rights in Canada*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2014; Sarah Carter. *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada to 1900*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1999; John S. Milloy. “Tipahamatoowin or Treaty 4?: Speculations on Alternate Texts.” *Native Studies Review*, 18(1), 2009; John L. Tobias. *The Origins of the Treaty Rights Movement in Saskatchewan: Canadian Plains Research Center*. Regina: U of Regina P, 1986; James Tully. *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995; among many others.

illustrative example of the many complications and entanglements that arise from inhabiting a “shared space,” even if the exact conditions or parameters of this shared space come under dispute. If, as Harold Cardinal and Walter Hildebrandt note, treaties demonstrate “the ways in which the spiritual principles of peace and sharing are related to, and woven into, concepts of kinship, governance, and the right to livelihood,” then I want to sit with and parse out these notions in all of their intimate, messy detail, especially as they pertain to kinship (viii). In this sense, the territory of Treaty Eight becomes a particular site or a geographic container for the manifestation of kinship relations within a shared geography, between differing Indigenous communities, as well as between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and other-than-human kin. My focus, then, is on this geography and how kinship relations have expanded, contracted, failed, or been disrupted over time, and how we are able to witness and experience these transmogrifying relations in the crevices and corners of the everyday. Because of the vastness of the territory of Treaty Eight (encapsulating lands and waterways located in what are currently known as the provinces of Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, as well as in the lower North West Territories), I will limit my examination to Cree communities in the area. The reasons for this have to do not only with issues of space (a document addressing the nuances of all the territories and communities of Treaty Eight far exceeds the bounds of this project), as well as personal issues (I am from a Cree community in northern Alberta, in Treaty Eight territory). Within this limited geographic area, there are many issues worth parsing in detail; however, the insights drawn from this in-depth engagement with a particular territory will likely be relevant to and resonate with other Indigenous contexts as well, including those with and without treaties. Nonetheless, given that my focus in this project is specifically on the territory of Treaty Eight, there is a need to provide the requisite context for those unfamiliar with the area.

In 1899, Treaty Eight was “signed” between the Canadian State and Indigenous communities in Northern Alberta, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan, as well as with nations in the lower North West Territories. The treaty was then, and is still currently, referred to as a “peace and friendship treaty.” In Alberta, the treaty stretches from the Athabasca river in the north to south of the Lesser Slave Lake, and to the provincial boundaries separating Alberta from British Columbia and Saskatchewan. There were several instigating factors that created and facilitated the development of the treaty, including, but not limited to, the following: the so-called Klondike gold rush beginning in 1896 that brought prospectors northwards; the expansion of the railroad that brought settlers north and westward for the explicit purposes of settling and working the land; the diplomacy of Indigenous communities who requested treaty conditions not only upon witnessing further encroachment by settlers, but also after seeing the land expropriations, strategic starvations, and physical violence enacted on their kin south of them in the prairies; among various other reasons (Carter, 2016; Cruikshank, 1992; Daschuk, 2013). After the treaty negotiations themselves, a commissioner who facilitated the treaty process (condescendingly) referred to Indigenous negotiators in Treaty Eight as possessing a “keenness of intellect,” much better than those of the southern “Indians on the Plains” (Laird qtd in Fumoleau, 84).⁷ Indeed, commissioner Laird continued: “Although in manners and dress the Indians of the North are much further advanced in civilization than other Indians were when treaties were made with them, they stand as much in need of the protection afforded by the law to aborigines as do any other Indians of the country, and are as fit subjects for the paternal care

⁷ Fumoleau’s text is insightful in that it provides an archive of correspondence from Indian agents, land surveyors, and commissioners in Treaty Eight and Treaty Eleven territories that can be, depending on the documents, hard to come by or locate.

of the Government” (Fumoleau, 91). This perceived “advanced civilizational” aspect was in spite of the Indigenous peoples in the area supposedly having no “definite organization ... no very distinctive characteristics, and as far as [treaty commissioners] could learn no traditions of any import” (Laird qtd in Fumoleau, 91). Many of the terms agreed to by these “two parties,” however, would not be honoured by the Canadian state, the ramifications of which are still being felt in Treaty Eight territory today.

Two aspects in particular that nations in Treaty Eight, specifically those who met at Lesser Slave Lake, argued against were the placing of communities in the area onto reserves, and the curtailing of their hunting, fishing, and trapping rights (these are just two examples of many). While treaty commissioners assured the communities that there would be no prohibitions against their ability to fish and hunt, and that they would have full access to what had traditionally been their territory without any imposed spatial regulations, the reality was in fact the opposite. As words from Laird make starkly clear, the commissioners were intent on pacifying any concerns Indigenous communities may have had in order to have the treaty signed as soon as possible: “the Indians were generally averse to being placed on reserves, it would have been impossible to have made a treaty if we had not assured them that there was no intention of confining them to reserves” (Fumoleau 89). Reserves, however, would be established soon thereafter, under the pretense that they were lands created for Indigenous peoples’ protection to secure them from settler encroachment and possible settler violence.

Regarding hunting, fishing, and trapping rights, the commissioners wrote in their letters to the crown that they “assured [the Indigenous communities] that the treaty would not lead to any forced interference with their mode of life,” yet they simultaneously declared that “whether treaty was made or not, they were subject to the law, bound to obey it, and liable to punishment

for any infringements of it” (Laird qtd in Fumoleau, 88). No reflections from the treaty commissioners appeared to take place about how the Canadian law *itself* was a direct interference in the lives of Indigenous peoples, or how, in the commissioners phrasing it thusly, that the law paradoxically appears to *precede* treaty in some capacity, as opposed to treaty allowing for the establishment of settler law. And just like with the development of the reserve system in the area, Cree communities in Treaty Eight saw their hunting and fishing rights subjected to strictures, in many ways worse than those of their counterparts in the southern prairies and other treaty territories. As Chelsea Vowel (Métis) writes, in “Treaty 8 territory ... Alberta treats trapping as a purely commercial right and ‘regulates it accordingly’,” and currently “[b]lanket trapping regulations are applied to Indigenous trappers on the basis that commercial rights under Treaty 8 were extinguished” (62). Vowel continues, “Licensing, fees, quotas, regulations about the building of cabins for trapping, and so on are all applied to Indigenous trappers” (62). These regulations were and are still enforced despite Indigenous negotiators in Treaty Eight focusing specifically on ensuring the proliferation and perpetuation of their hunting, fishing, and trapping rights during the negotiation process.

The above debates/stances on the meaning and intent behind treaty are a part of a long lineage of treaty discourse. In this discourse, a recurring theme is whether or not treaty or the treaty process should be framed as an “imperial” or “anti-imperial” device throughout history – that is to say, whether treaties (in this instance the numbered treaties) are solely a strategy for dispossession wielded by the settler state, or if treaties can be deployed in a liberatory sense for and by Indigenous peoples (Belmassous, 2014). In the introduction to her edited collection *Empire by Treaty*, Saliha Belmassous in “The Paradox of an Empire by Treaty,” charts the multiple instantiations of treaty in a variety of regions and contextualizes them as potentially

serving both functions (imperial vs. anti-imperial; colonial vs. anti-colonial), depending on when they are implemented and by and between whom. Audra Simpson (2017), in “The Ruse of Consent and Anatomy of Refusal,” also underscores this ambivalence of treaty, writing that the major imbalance in thinking through treaties was and is the “converting [of] treaties from Indigenous understandings of forms of relationship (often called ‘renewal’) to contracts and land cessions” (28). These accounts are in contradistinction to scholars and writers who (almost solely) view treaty as being predominantly an imperial device, an instrument of conquest, including Patrick Wolfe in his article “Against the Intentional Fallacy” (2007), as well as Bonnie Honig (2011). These scholars are not the only ones interested in this debate around the ambivalence of treaty (Asch, 2002; Patton, 2014; Tully 1995), and this discussion is ongoing. However, the concerns of this project are not within the parameters of this debate exactly; rather, whether treaty is an imperial device or not, I am interested in how its historical and contemporary application has disrupted the lives of Indigenous peoples in profound, everyday ways. That is to say, even if future-oriented implementations of treaty are potentially liberatory for Indigenous communities, this still does not nullify or recuperate the damages that have been done to Indigenous peoples by the implementation of treaties, specifically when it comes to the disruption of kinship formations. In particular, the more minute colonial fractures within communities are often not dealt with in any significant capacity in larger, macropolitical treaty discourse, despite their consequences having immediate, and in some cases dire, ramifications for Indigenous peoples on the ground, in their communities, and in their homes.

Writing about “the signing of Treaty 8,” Bonita Lawrence notes how that even though “the assignation of Indianness or mixed-bloodedness during this treaty was quite arbitrary,” it nonetheless dictated one’s situatedness *within* treaty and had adverse consequences for inter- and

intra-community relations (90). Lawrence describes how “stereotypes informed who was classified as half-breed or Indian during the signing of the treaty – those individuals who had successful, even leadership, characteristics and charisma were considered to be half-breeds, while those who seemed to require charitable assistance, such as the families of widows, were considered to be Indian” (91). This colonially imposed distinction served to drive a wedge between “half-breed” and “Indian” kin, thus heightening the differences between “Indian” and “half-breed” communities. According to Lawrence, the impact of these differential designations created and then entrenched divisions between community members, and “communities who had essentially not differentiated among their membership were suddenly forced into two distinct categories” (91). For scholars like Lawrence, the “numbered treaties,” like Treaty Eight, “have thus been crucial to the project of forcibly identifying and segregating half-breeds from Indians, regardless of how individuals saw themselves” (91). Indeed, Lawrence also outlines how, if large subsets of communities were away during the signing of treaty, then these peoples would simply be labelled as “half-breeds” on governmental records, and then were required to be physically and geographically removed from their kin, since “half-breeds” were not allowed to live on reserve.

Here, we see how, though the numbered treaties might be (or had the potential to be) generative or mutually beneficial for relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups, they had the devastating effect of separating Indigenous relations from one another in ways that were only solidified over time. Writing about a different context, Rob Innes (Cree) notes how distinctions between members of the Cowessess First Nation were largely externally imposed, and that the emphasizing of these differential relations between members undermined traditional kinship structures and practices functioning in the area. How this manifested in

practice was the partitioning of the Cowessess First Nation into variegated “ethnocentric categories” so that what was before referred to simply as “the community” (Innes 74) became differentiated Indigenous groups (Cree, Saulteaux, Assiniboine, Métis), with some groups needing to be geographically separated because of imposed legal categories (i.e., the Métis). Speaking to this process of governmentally imposed separation, Innes notes: “For most Aboriginal people in general, and for Plains Cree, Assiniboine, Saulteaux, and Métis specifically, the network of kinship relations was more important than ethnicity for group identity formation” (74). With the introduction of treaty between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups, which subsequently became mediated through and by the Indian Act, the way in which “kinship operated” in everyday life was ignored, and the in-group or community “flexibility needed to survive and thrive on the northern plains” was targeted for elimination (Innes 76). Quoting J.R. Miller, Innes gestures to this strategic separation when he writes: “Investigators of both Indian and Métis history topics really must ask themselves how ... they are willing to allow obsolete statutory distinctions that were developed in Ottawa in pursuit of bureaucratic convenience and economy ... shape their research strategies” (73).

To be clear, I am not stating that treaties ultimately were divisive tools implemented solely by the Canadian state, but rather am gesturing to the ways in which larger, macropolitical focuses on treaties can sometimes obscure or ignore the quotidian manifestations of these agreements. In particular, I am interested in how macroscale scholarly and community works devoted to treaties and diplomacy between settlers and Indigenous peoples can neglect the more intimate and entangled relationships eclipsed in discussions of the nation-state and its statecraft with and against Indigenous communities. For as Innes notes, although “cultural practices, such as languages, ceremonies, and kinship patterns, were greatly affected” by the machinations of

settler colonialism, they ultimately were “never totally eradicated” (7). Thus, how kinship relations operate and manifest in the contemporary moment should be elaborated, especially given how they are differently influenced in variegated regions and geographies. Ultimately, what is important for me is how kinship relations are mobilized, sustained, or ruptured, and how then the communities implicated in or comprised of these relations react to or counteract these processes.

KINSHIP

According to Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee Nation), kinship is a “web of [...] rights and responsibilities that link the People, the land, and the cosmos together in an ongoing and dynamic system of mutually-affecting relationships” (“Go Away Water!,” 6). For Kim TallBear (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate/Cheyenne/Arapaho), kinship means “learning how to live here in relation with this place and with peoples who were long co-constituted in relation to these lands and waters and skies” (n.p.). These characterizations provided by Justice and TallBear are consistent with the sets of values, ideals, and principles that a majority of Indigenous communities and nations mean when they articulate their forms of kinship as well. For many Indigenous peoples, kinship is a process, a practice, something that one does and must commit to doing daily – in this way, we can say that kinship is iterative. And, more than that, kinship is a set of responsibilities and obligations Indigenous peoples must honour in a collective and individual sense, with these relational ties reaching across vast distances in, through, and across time. Acts of kinship, then, are contextual, changing to meet the needs of communities in particular spatial and temporal settings, transmogrifying when necessary. To this point, Rob

Innes writes, “[k]inship patterns do not exist in a vacuum; they interact with the social environment that surrounds the people who exercise them” (42).

In a Cree context, kinship is often conceptualized as *wahkohtowin*, which is commonly translated as “everything is related,” but in a more specific sense, means the *act* of being related or in relation to one another.⁸ Again, here it is important to recognize that kinship is an *act* or an action, something one must do or perform ethically and routinely. Daniel Justice describes this well when he writes that “kinship is best thought of as a verb rather than a noun, because kinship, in most indigenous contexts, is something that’s *done* more than something that simply *is*” (“Go Away Water!,” 150). Further, as Sylvia McAdam (Cree) notes, *wahkohtowin* is “used to describe the kinship connections to all of creation, such as the various clan systems that create kinship responsibilities to the animals and to creation in general” (60). “Language and *wâhkôhtowin*,” McAdam continues, “are critical and crucial in understanding how *nêhiyawak* regard relationships as *the foundation* to their ties to everything, including creation” (63, emphasis mine).⁹ Kinship, relationality, or its specific community cognates (like *wahkohtowin*) can be said to be the fulcrum around which Indigenous communities adhere, with healthy and ethical relations radiating outwards and influencing larger macropolitical relationships, agreements, or arrangements. Brenda Macdougall (Métis), in speaking to these broader, macropolitical organizations, stresses that “*wahkootowin* provides structure to society; infuses institutions with meaning; establishes protocols and frameworks for interaction and behaviour; is the foundation

⁸ See any number of Cree dictionaries for more on the concept of, or alternative (though related) definitions for, *wahkohtowin*. One such example is the *Alberta Elders' Cree Dictionary* (1998) published through the University of Alberta Press.

⁹ Worth mentioning is that differences abound in the Cree language, not only in terms of different dialects, but also in terms of the differences in orthography and diction within the same dialect. While McAdam chooses to use [â] and [ô] in her spelling of *wahkohtowin*, in my own experiences in learning the language, I have not encountered these spellings. The use of *nêhiyawak* in this quote means “the Cree people.”

for pursuing any economic, political, social, or cultural activity; and is essential for the creation of an alliance” (7). Important to recognize here is that the quotidian (oftentimes) taken-for-granted relationships we have with one another have profound implications in larger societal, cultural, and political formations, including everything from inter- or intra-political coalition work between Indigenous groups, to broader political forms like treaties. To put it simply, if our interpersonal relationships with one another are unethical, toxic, or unhealthy (if we are, in a sense, practicing bad *wahkohtowin*), then it follows that large-scale manifestations of Indigenous community formations or alliances will also take on these characteristics as well.

Kinship, however, is also a term with a long and complicated lineage and history, especially as it has been described and operationalized by the field of anthropology. According to Innes, “kinship studies are a significant but often ignored area of research within Native Studies” (6). Following the work of anthropologist Raymond DeMallie, Innes claims that this neglect has to do with kinship studies’ close “association with anthropology” (6). Indeed, DeMallie himself has pointed out that the formation of the field of anthropology in North America is largely indebted to “Lewis Henry Morgan’s study of Iroquois kinship” in the “mid-nineteenth century” (307). More generally, ethnographic studies of kinship have been foundational to the field of anthropology (Anderson, 1984; Boas, 1916; Clastres, 1974; Kroeber, 1909; Lounsbury, 1956; Radcliffe-Brown, 1940; Rivers, 1968; *inter alia*),¹⁰ and they were central to anthropology’s representations of Indigenous communities as less-developed,

¹⁰ This is just a handful of a seemingly endless amount of texts having to do with anthropology’s (obsessive) preoccupation with Indigenous forms of kinship. Indeed, the fields of ethnology and ethnography are in a sense constituted by this desire to know forms of kinship and modes of Indigenous everyday life more generally. I provide a sampling here to gesture to the sheer volume of texts at hand.

disappearing peoples within the presumptively unilinear, Western-led developmental trajectory of humanity.¹¹

As Audra Simpson notes, Lewis Henry “Morgan’s scheme was premised entirely on the notion of the Iroquois as a vanishing people,” and she describes his efforts as a part of a broader intellectual and material exercise in settler colonialization, with various institutions (including academic ones) complicit in this movement (*Mohawk Interruptus*, 77). Simpson puts it bluntly: “Morgan and his forefathers were part of the symbolic and physical settlement of the New York State” (*Mohawk Interruptus*, 78-9). Philip J. Deloria echoes Simpson’s sentiments about the anthropologist, writing that “Morgan’s later anthropological work (from the 1850s through his death in 1881) moved away from the interior literary experience ... and focused instead on scientific paradigms that viewed both Indian people and Indian pasts as objects – figures and histories of significant difference that were thus suitable for detached analysis” (93). This detached analysis and the “anthropological discipline that eventually grew to maturity around figures like Morgan gradually institutionalized this subject-object dichotomy,” with Indigenous peoples routinely denied subjecthood and cast instead as objects “worthy” of study (93). The impact of the field exceeded the scholarly realm, as “[i]n the latter half of the nineteenth century, ethnography became an increasingly powerful and influential method, and many Americans came to see Indian people through it” (93). Anthropology, then, plays a foundational role (along with other disciplines) in not only the imaginative distortion of Indigenous peoples, but also in

¹¹ While the field of anthropology has made strides in recent years to address its colonially-informed beginnings, particularly through the work of Indigenous anthropologists like Audra Simpson, Les Sabiston, and others, the tension between Indigenous studies and anthropology still exists, especially since the foundations of anthropology rest so heavily on Indigenous peoples’ shoulders the world over (an issue that Simpson herself addresses throughout her 2014 text *Mohawk Interruptus*).

their material dispossessions as well, since it facilitates the knowledge (or lack thereof) that ultimately always posits Indigenous communities as vanishing, in a sense clearing way for settlement. And given its ties to Morgan, it appears as though kinship studies is also somewhat imbricated in these histories of falsehoods, erasures, and displacements.

In spite of these histories, kinship still plays an imperative role in Indigenous collective formations, since ideas pertaining to kinship relations (like *wahkohtowin* above) have been an integral part of Indigenous communities for centuries, well before the prying eyes and intentions of anthropologists interfered in them. That said, kinship is still not as highly prioritized relative to other issues deemed crucial to Indigenous peoples and communities.¹² As DeMallie has noted, scholars, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, “frequently dismiss kinship studies as arcane and irrelevant to such larger concerns as politics, economics, or religion” (307). Assertions such as these, that kinship matters little (or not as much) in the face of “big picture” macropolitical issues such as “politics” and “economics,” may have potentially damaging effects on Indigenous studies, and Indigenous communities more generally. Not only do these assertions ignore the fact that notions of kinship are entangled and imbricated in all of these aspects (politics, economics, religion), but these assertions also conform to the logic that issues having to do with politics (i.e., the land, governance) are the *raison d’être* of Indigenous studies, and in pursuing them community members can shirk, or actively violate, their everyday relational obligations to other members within the community. These prioritizations of the macropolitical make it appear as though no other lines of thought or reasoning were or are of any import to Indigenous studies

¹² I say this after witnessing a well-revered scholar within Indigenous studies offhandedly refer to relationality and kinship studies as “vapid” at the most recent gathering of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) in Los Angeles, California.

and/or Indigenous communities, as though practices of kinship or relationality have nothing to do with, or mean little to, larger Indigenous political, societal, or cultural issues. Following Billy-Ray Belcourt (Cree), this project is interested in troubling the “constraints that magnetic words like sovereignty, self-determination, and peoplehood place on Indigenous studies,” and the way they possibly eclipse or foreclose on more intimate, entangled ways of being with (or being in kinship with) one another (“Indigenous Studies,” 182). Challenging the presumed dichotomy (and hierarchy) of macro- and micro-political concerns, many Indigenous feminists have sought to complicate and pluralize notions of sovereignty and self-determination, addressing intimate – but no less important – scales of sovereign authority, including at the level of the body, while also showing how intimate sovereignties are entangled and interdependent with the larger-scale sovereignties of Indigenous nations. Thus, they argue, violence against an individual Indigenous person should be treated with the same level of concern, and demand the same level of response, as dangerous resource extraction projects or changes in federal Indian policy.

In addition to the narrow ways in which concepts like sovereignty are often conceptualized, terms like kinship or relationality are often times rendered as “apolitical” or “depolitical,” when they are, in fact, quite the opposite (Schneider, 1984; Srivastava, 2011). Kinship is work; it takes labour to be in relation with other people, and to hold them accountable to a community or communities. As Brenda Macdougall states about “wahkootowin,” it is an ongoing political project invested in “linking people and communities in a large, complex web of relationships,” but one that is also attune to the myriad complex and messy ways we live – or attempt to live – together (8). However, with the rise of nation- or community-specific terms for relationality or kinship, there has also been an increasing tendency to mobilize these concepts (such as wahkohtowin) in a way that is easily commodifiable, consumable, or conflated with

other liberal, assimilative projects such as reconciliation. For example, in September 2017, I attended a conference held by the University of Alberta in Edmonton entitled the “Reconciliation | Wahkohtowin Conference,” and it charged patrons \$150 - \$200 to attend. Not only did this conference monetize relations in a sense by requiring individuals to pay to gather with one another, but it also tacitly attempted to conflate wahkohtowin with reconciliation, with the diacritical [|] being the only thing separating the two words. In a sense, then, a fusion occurs whereby reconciliation becomes the projected ideal or anticipatory mode of wahkohtowin, as the (imposed) horizon of what kinship relations could possibly look like or the form they could take. However, as much recent scholarship by Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars alike has demonstrated, reconciliation means little when it is coercive, and when it is distanced from notions of “truth” (Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures*, 158). Reconciliation, as a concept, has a long history in settler colonial contexts, especially in Canada, Australia, and South Africa. Quoting Anishinaabe scholar Dale Turner, Glen Coulthard describes “reconciliation” as “the process by which things are brought to ‘agreement, concord, or harmony; the fact of being made consistent or compatible” (107). Coulthard elaborates that it is “frequently inferred by proponents of political reconciliation that restoring these relationships requires that individuals and groups work to overcome the debilitating pain, anger, and resentment that frequently persist in the wake of being injured or harmed by a perceived or real injustice” (107). Thus, state-sponsored reconciliation efforts in colonial contexts tend to require that Indigenous people “reconcile” themselves to their continued colonization, and do little by way of tangible, material changes to relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Meanwhile, little is asked of settlers beyond an apology, and settler futurities (and the harmful, neglectful, or broken

relationships upon which they are constituted/structured) are secured with little substantive transformation of the Indigenous-settler relation.

What I want to foreground here is a future that is not “reconciled” to colonialism, one without a neat, tidy, and ultimately overdetermined or prescribed ending. For it is precisely these kinds of sloppily enforced reconciliatory efforts that foreclose on a politics of “rupture ... [and] division,” and that aim for “the aspirational recasting of a near-total unity” that exists more in mind than in practice or politics (Ciccariello-Maher 5). Kinship, in all its messiness and complexity, allows for a relationship that is not predetermined; rather, it is active, something that must be restored and worked on at different times and in different spaces. This aim for a fictive unity, or difference-suppressing happy resolution, is concerned less with “substantive differences” and more with “who can claim the mantle of speaking for everyone and whose unity is therefore preferable” (Ciccariello-Maher 3). Because of the presumed inevitability of reconciliation and the centering of settler futurities that are not attentive to issues having to do with complicated kinship with Indigenous peoples, interpretative lenses are already circumscribed by categories of forced unity or harmony, and thus, the possibility of non-colonial futures is foreclosed. Within frameworks of reconciliation, alternative relationships and societal formations are impossible to imagine because their potential is already made a conceptual impossibility, a void, and the necessary process of working through how to enact ethical relations outside of colonialism is pre-empted. It is for these reasons that Donna Haraway (2016) proclaims that she is “not interested in reconciliation or restoration, but [she is] deeply committed to the more modest possibilities of partial recuperation and getting on together” (10). Indeed, Haraway refers to this as “staying with the trouble” (10). Elaborating further, she writes: “And so I look for real stories that are also speculative fabulations and speculative realisms.

These are stories in which multispecies players, who are enmeshed in partial and flawed translations across difference, redo ways of living and dying attuned to still possible finite flourishing, still possible recuperation” (10).¹³ Staying with the trouble is, in many ways, a commitment to kinship-making, or attending to the lived realities of kinship in the everyday.

While this project is predominantly interested in forms of Indigenous kinship, it is worth gesturing to the equally complex and entangled nature of kinship in other contexts, such as in Black and/or queer socialities. In the case of Black studies or Black publics, kinship or kin is a fraught term as it has been irreversibly affected by the transatlantic slave trade. In Saidiya Hartman’s (2006) beautiful memoir, *Lose Your Mother*, kinships are the bonds that one forms through dispossession and displacement. Because of the historical sundering of families through the horrors of chattel slavery, and its afterlife, many Black persons in the diaspora are unable to locate their “kin” from their places of (familial) “origin.” This issue is magnified not only by the shoddy record-keeping (or lack thereof) of where persons were stolen from, but also because time and space have dramatically altered these affiliations, so much so that people may be distantly related to people in Ghana (as Hartman is) or Africa more broadly, but these same peoples nevertheless may not be recognized as kin to the families from which they were taken, in spite of one’s “fantasy of reunited kin” (Hartman 195). Indeed, this issue becomes more complex if these once-kin were complicit in the “giving up” of other kin for slavery. Hartman refers to these variegated layers, tensions, and contradictions as “the wound of kinship” (178). Following Hartman, Black studies scholars like Fred Moten have engaged this notion of “wounded kinship” not as something to remedy, but rather as the condition of Black life itself and the forms of

¹³ While I find Haraway’s kinship critique vital, I recognize that it has the potential to also be mobilized in particular ways that could be detrimental to Indigenous land relations.

resistance and new/other ways of being-in-the-world it offers: “This interest is, in turn, not in the interest of a nostalgic and impossible suturing of wounded kinship but is rather directed toward what this irrepressibly inscriptive, reproductive, and resistant material objecthood does” (Moten 18).

In queer contexts, claiming kinship can be a way to circumvent heteronormative forms of reproduction. In a statement that resonates with Daniel Heath Justice’s proclamation that “kinship is best thought of as a verb rather than a noun, because kinship, in most indigenous contexts, is something that’s *done* more than something that simply *is*” (“Go Away Water!,” 150), Judith Butler asserts that, in queer contexts, “kinship is a kind of doing, one that does not reflect a prior structure but which can only be understood as an enacted practice” (Butler 34). And yet, while Scott Morgensen acknowledges that increasingly there have been some “white desires for kinship across the differences presented by Native, Black, and non-Black racialized people” (“Encountering Indeterminacy,” n.p.), many queer BIPOC scholars and activists have pointed out how white queer subjects are amenable to claiming kin, but not across all forms of difference, such as gender, dis/ability, or race. Furthermore, predominantly white queer communities have been critiqued for not recognizing how these notions of claiming kin or making kin are steeped not only in the histories of settler colonialism and its attendant (“straight-making”) violences, but also the transatlantic slave trade as well (Heintz, 2017; Rifkin, 2010).

There is also a way in which the complex entanglements or the incommensurabilities of kinship are often times avoided, and settler critics, scholars, artists, and the broader settler public more generally cannot conceive of a world otherwise, wherein the relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, or between non-Indigenous peoples themselves, are fraught, or where societal problems are not easily resolvable for the sake of civil, social, or political

expediency. Speaking to these tensions, and arguing against reconciliation in a different sense, Black studies scholar Christina Sharpe writes that “[w]hite people must refuse reconciliation to ongoing brutality; they must rend the fabric of the kinship narrative” (n.p.). Here, Sharpe is gesturing to the ways in which white people who are committed to ending racial violence must ultimately untether themselves from their fellow white kin, given that whiteness is little more than “a way of sorting oneself and others into categories of those [i.e. other white people] who must be protected and those who are, or soon will be, expendable” (n.p.). In many ways, white kinship is predicated on the deliberate destabilization, unravelling, and persecution of other forms of kinship and relationality—so for white people to lose their kin is, in some sense, for other peoples to retain or regain kinship relations.

Sharpe challenges the superficial anxieties that many white liberals have over the loss of their kin, which cause them to balk at the idea of severing relations with their white friends and family members: “[white people] take to the streets to protest, and yet some speak *this* fear of potential loss of kin into the same ether as their co-workers, friends, and colleagues who are marked (as Black/Muslim/refugee/Latinx/immigrant/LGBTQI/differently abled/Asian and Native American/undocumented) and are in imminent danger” (n.p., emphasis in original). What is dangerous to Sharpe is that, while white people might “equivocate at the thought and reality of losing kin, and at probable discomfort and pain,” in the space of this equivocation, “they reconstitute and re-enflesh that ghost of a past that is not yet past” (n.p.). In doing so, white people adhere to “the grammar of reconciliation with kin by any means,” despite the catastrophic consequences that this grammar may have on other peoples and communities (n.p.). The solution, to Sharpe, is ultimately for white people to “lose [their] kin” (n.p.). I might further suggest that,

in losing their white kin, white people open up the possibility of making kin with those whom they have previously “cast out as not kin” (n.p.).

Although Sharpe is speaking about this in the context of Black and white relations in the afterlife of slavery in the US, there are many resonances with relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Writing at length about kinship relations between Indigenous communities (specifically Dakota) and white settlers, Kim TallBear posits:

The whites did not know how to do kinship. This took the Dakota a long time to understand. The Dakota had already been living with French fur traders for decades whom they had been able to inter-marry with, trade with, incorporate into their societies, although this was not always a bed of roses. Kinship never is. But these new settlers, English and German speaking, only knew how to evangelize, appropriate, and suppress. They had no interest in engaging in kinship relations. They had no interest in learning from Dakota people. They would make treaties in order to get what they wanted, and then renege on their obligations. (n.p)¹⁴

Indeed, for Indigenous peoples, the options available to them were quite clear: “The Indian must either adapt to their partitioning of the world—the partitioning of lands, communities, forms of love and kinship, resources, and knowledges—into categories that would either discipline the Indian into being a Christian citizen, or would result in their death” (n.p.). Putting it bluntly, TallBear declares that “[t]he settler state has been very poor kin indeed” (n.p.). However, in spite

¹⁴ It is important to be attentive to the differing modalities of whiteness, especially as it operates in relation to settler colonialism. While the French may have been somewhat more “benevolent” to Indigenous peoples in some early engagements with Indigenous communities, this still does not negate the ways in which white French settlers – and other white settlers more broadly – have benefited and continue to benefit from settler colonialism.

of these facts, TallBear also envisions the possibility for ethical kinship relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Addressing her audience or the reader directly, TallBear writes: “But indigenous folks might have something quite different in mind. I hear them talking about your need to take on the obligations of kinship. This isn’t about indigenous peoples being incorporated into your world. It’s about you learning how to live here in relation with this place and with peoples who were long co-constituted in relation to these lands and waters and skies” (n.p.). For TallBear, Indigenous communities’ “critiques and ongoing agreement-making” have been “continued calls for non-indigenous people to engage in good relations, which involve exchange, not cruel evangelizing of settler lifeways” (n.p.). These continued calls are “the steady work of kin-making in order to live,” and Indigenous peoples “continue to call the settler state to account for its failures at kin-making here [in North America], with both humans and nonhumans” (n.p.). Karyn Recollet (Cree) echoes TallBear’s statements, encouraging a form of “kin in the making” between not only Indigenous peoples ourselves, but between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples as well. Recollet refers to this as cultivating “choreographies of ... kin making,” a process we engage in “because we recognize when we are kin in the making and this is important to us” (n.p.).

Kin-making, or establishing kin-in-the-making, is imperative, since as TallBear notes: “We need kin to survive” (n.p.). In the chapters to follow, particularly Chapters Two and Three, I gesture to both “losing one’s kin” and notions of “kin (in the) making” as potentially necessary practices of getting on in the world in a good way. Indigenous forms of kinship encompass political orders, cultural production, social reproduction, and place-based cosmologies – in contrast to Western idea(l)s of kinship. And yet, Indigenous notions of kinship are expansive, and can include or bring into the fold peoples steeped in these often toxic white/Western notions

of kinship and the violences they enable. If, for Saidiya Hartman, “Slavery is the ghost in the machine of kinship” then we might also say, through a different though related set of histories, that “Settler Colonialism is the ghost in the machine of kinship” for Indigenous peoples. Toxic forms of kinship have been weaponized to rationalize terribly violent forms of familial and state violence (residential schools separating families, the gendered nature of the Indian Act, among other things). Yet, there are forms of kin and kin-making that might offer possibilities for undoing colonization. This is not to romanticize these forms of kin-making, but rather to recognize that, if shared decolonial futures are to be possible on the lands that are currently colonized by settler states and communities, then non-Indigenous peoples will need to learn to honour their obligations to their possible kin – including both Indigenous peoples, and the other-than-human kin with whom we share our lands and waters.

THE EVERYDAY

Cree, Treaty Eight poet and scholar Billy-Ray Belcourt asserts that Indigenous studies routinely fails “[t]o step into the thick of the everyday in Indigenous social worlds,” and to do so would be to enact “a practice of methodological disobedience” (“Indigenous Studies,” 182). Ultimately, to Belcourt, Indigenous studies “misapprehends the tumult of everyday life” (“Indigenous Studies,” 182). In a similar vein, Kwagiulth scholar Sarah Hunt points to the ways in which Indigenous studies, and Indigenous communities more broadly, privilege certain issues facing Indigenous communities over other pertinent and persistent problems. Writing about the violences that Indigenous women, queer, and non-binary peoples face outside of and inside of communities, Hunt asks: “[W]hat would happen if every time an Indigenous woman had her personal boundaries crossed without consent, we were moved to act in the same way as we’ve

seen to the threat of a pipeline in our territories...” (8). In short, why are certain issues (land, jurisdiction) designated as paramount to notions of Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty, while other issues are simply relegated into the realm of “the intimate” or “the personal,” and in a sense separate to or from these larger, “legitimate” political preoccupations? The issues neglected by Indigenous scholars and communities, and labelled as not pertaining to the “more important” terrains of Indigenous socio-political discourse, often most significantly affect Indigenous women, queer, and two-spirit peoples. Speaking to this in *I Am Woman*, Lee Maracle (Sto:lo) states that “the Native question,” having to do with “Native self-government [and] the Native land question,” predominated in Indigenous movements and activist organizations (the American Indian Movement being a prominent example), while “the woman question still did not exist for us” (18). Influenced by the work of Hunt and Maracle, and their work on the everyday nature of settler colonialism and its effects on Indigenous communities, Leey'qsun scholar Rachel Flowers writes that “[i]t is crucial that we shift our mode of thinking away from ownership of community members, toward our own understandings of kin relations, the system of relationships wherefrom we derive our obligations and laws” (43). She continues: “[o]ur laws also provide our original responsibility to love and care for the lands, the waters, the sky, and all its beings. The law to be of good mind and heart is a law of the everyday” (43). It is to the “everyday” or “everyday life” that I turn to, then, as a useful analytic for examining everything from Indigenous politics, socialities, and kinship relations. However, I do not turn to these issues to draw a sharp distinction between the everyday and its opposite, between micro- and macropolitical issues, but rather to show how they are deeply entwined, and how we should be attentive to their entanglements to be attuned to how settler colonialism operates in the contemporary moment as well as across temporalities, in intimate and wide-open spatialities.

Western theories of “everyday life” are often attributed to the growth of spatial theory and/or the discipline of human geography, as well as to the rise of the study of phenomenology in philosophy. These philosophical treatises range across time and space, including, but not limited to, texts such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (1927), Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* (1958), among others.¹⁵ The everyday, as a site of analysis, is often portrayed as having to do with experiential knowledge and, at times, is framed as a distraction from the larger, more material issues facing individuals. This insight, however, fails to account for how the effects of stratified social relations are felt most acutely in the everyday: the burden of poverty, missed bill payments, an empty stomach. More than simply studying dwelling, living, or traversing through space in a particular historical moment, Everyday Life Theory is preoccupied with how the quotidian is not only a useful site of analysis, but also when put into practice, it is a generative space of resistance as well, to both micro- and macro-political/social violences. In terms of western, Eurocentric notions of the everyday and its resistive possibilities, there are two theorists in particular who have cast a long shadow over the field of Everyday Life Theory, often eclipsing or taking precedence over the works of Indigenous, Black, and queer studies’ engagements with the everyday.

¹⁵ This field of study is not reducible to these scholars (or a variety of other pale, male, and stale critics), but rather I am just loosely sketching how this field has been populated by predominantly cis-heteronormative white men often at the expense of women, queer, and non-binary folks, as well as Black, Indigenous, and people of colour communities also. Of course, this is not to say these groups were not thinking or writing about these issues in these different times and spaces; instead, I am gesturing to the way in which “the everyday” and those that it has often affected are usually marginalized from the field, and their work rarely, if ever, is engaged with, aside from by people from those very same communities.

The first scholar is German Jewish philosopher and critic Walter Benjamin. Walter Benjamin's most influential (and unfinished) work, *The Arcades Project* (1999), is a phenomenological study of nineteenth-century industrial capitalism in Paris, though the insights provided in his text are applicable to other cities as well. Benjamin is preoccupied with how the "mythic history" constructed in one epoch persists unabated into the next century, proffering up images of equality by evoking a mutual investment in industrial and technological progress. This "history" goes unquestioned and "unabated" into the next because of the way in which phantasmagoria, as Benjamin labels it, functions to establish capitalist production as a "natural force" of history, one which propels the notion of "progress" forward as both unfettered and unexamined (Benjamin, "Exposé of 1939," 25). Further, the mythic, "primal history" (a term Benjamin uses repeatedly and does not problematize) produced by capitalist production is also described by Benjamin as an unconscious "collective dream," a dream from which the proletariat or working-classes should endeavour to awake. The method by which the unconscious collective of the "contemporary epoch" can "awaken" from the mythic dream of capitalist production is from an interpretation of the refuse of the one prior – by bringing the everyday detritus of the past into the present for examination (Benjamin, *Arcades*, 389). What Benjamin is engaged in with his *Arcades Project*, then, is "an experiment in the technique of awakening" (Benjamin, *Arcades*, 389). In this sense, the aim of Benjamin's project is to make visible the "dream" (i.e. the mythical history perpetuated by capitalism) that supplies its own end; that produces the material, historical, and everyday objects which will bring about its demise. One figure Benjamin tasks with achieving this monumental feat is the flâneur, the revolutionary "passionate but detached observer of modern life" (Highmore 36). The figure of the flâneur has "recently been scrutinized by a number of feminist cultural historians" (Highmore 141), as well as by Black,

Indigenous, and other scholars and writers of colour. Specifically, feminist cultural historians charged the flâneur with having the ability to inhabit or walk through spaces coded or dominated by male presence, a luxury not afforded to women who routinely had their movements regulated by the state, their communities, as well as their families (not to mention those male flâneurs who routinely harassed them).

The other theorist of note is Michel de Certeau, who, in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980), examines the ways in which practices of “consumption/production” and an active engagement with space constitute “new ways of operating,” ones in which subjects deploy tactics to offset or undercut the forces of strategic power. These new modes/ways of operating manifest themselves in everyday “practices,” and provide new notions of agency which are not subsumed or enveloped by Foucauldian notions of power. Rather, these practices operate within frameworks of power and they are both constitutive and (potentially) resistant to regulatory practices. Central to de Certeau’s text are the notions of “strategies” and “tactics,” as strategies exist as the “force-relationships” from which “tactics” arise (xix). Tactics are the ephemeral actions (“speech acts”) which have no locus in and of themselves (i.e., outside of systems), and strategies are the ‘proper’ “place[s] or institution[s]” which are predicated on (and which conceal) ‘power’ (de Certeau 97). The tactics (speech acts, creativity, bricolage) employed to counter strategies advance the idea that “subjects” are not passive but are actively “manipulating and enjoying” within structures or environments (e.g., language or city grids) (de Certeau xxii). Further, de Certeau elaborates on the ways in which individuals may “deflect ... [power]” from within by altering or deviating from prescriptive “dominant social orders” – by “mutating” the ways in which one uses and consumes while still remaining within prescribed, power-laden “syntactical forms” (xiii/xviii). Michel de Certeau, by drawing on the work of Michel Foucault,

provides an analysis that attempts to reconfigure (or re-attribute) the notion of agency to individuals in geographies and space overdetermined by power, allowing for the potential (however fleeting) of resistance.

In the cases of both Benjamin and de Certeau, it is not a stretch to assume that the “subjects” (or, in the case of Benjamin, the flâneur) they imagine are most likely white men. For instance, although de Certeau celebrates the agential freedom of his subject within the matrices of power, he in no way addresses how differently gendered or racialized peoples might navigate these same spaces, and whether the speech acts they engage in might not always already be disciplined or surveilled in some capacity. Ben Highmore labels this as “the unevenness of the everyday,” whereby everyday life scholars have failed to engage with “the unproblematic privileging of an easy spatial and social mobility” outlined by Benjamin, de Certeau, and others, and how this is ultimately “symptomatic (as well as diagnostic) of the unevenness of urban experience,” as well as experiences with, of, and in other geographic spaces (141). In Canadian geographies in particular, two recently published texts, as well as numerous other documented accounts, detail how Black peoples are routinely stopped and searched in urban environments (Maynard, 2017), and how Indigenous peoples (especially youth) are racially profiled on the prairies (Dhillon, 2017). These engagements write against the (pre)dominant portrayals provided by the mostly white cis-hetero male scholars above, as well as the other oft-cited works of Everyday Life Theory: to name only a few, Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), Henri Lefebvre’s *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (1968) and *The Production of Space* (1974), and Georg Simmel’s *The Conflict in Modern Culture and Other Essays* (1968).

Addressing the dominance of people like Benjamin, de Certeau, and Lefebvre in Everyday life studies and discourse, queer scholar Lauren Berlant (2011) insists that in her work,

“[i]nstead of the vision of the everyday *organized* by capitalism that we find in Lefebvre and de Certeau, among others, [she is] interested in the overwhelming ordinary that is *disorganized* by it, and by many other forces besides” (8-9, italics in original). Influenced by some of the feminist cultural historians’ work mentioned by Ben Highmore (2002) above, as well as work by other LGBTQ scholars, Berlant posits that “Everyday life theory” as a “conventional framework for comprehending the contemporary world ... no longer describes how most people in the world live” (8). In fact, Berlant argues that “the reflexive scanning that provided relief for the flaneuse and the flaneur no longer does, but rather exemplifies the mass sensorium engendered by problems of survival that are public and that induce a variety of collective affective responses to the shapelessness of the present that constant threat wreaks” (8). Berlant instead aligns her project with works “thinking about the ordinary as an impasse shaped by crisis in which people find themselves developing skills for adjusting to newly proliferating pressures to scramble for modes of living on” (8). These works that Berlant is referring to include reflective ruminations on the mundane, such as Kathleen Stewart’s *Ordinary Affects* (2011), or the queer affective and performative terrains explored by the late José Esteban Muñoz in his text *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009).

Ultimately, Berlant refers to her project as a study in “cruel optimism,” which is when “something you desire is actually the obstacle to your flourishing,” and may “involve food, or a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of the good life, or a political project” (1). For Berlant, cruel optimism becomes a problem precisely because it takes “the good life” as its end-point; that is to say, we become attached to objects/ideas/ideals that harm us ultimately because they promise “the good life” as their telos. As this idea has become increasingly untenable to Berlant in a world defined by precarity, scarcity, and ongoing violences, she has deemed the good life as an

aspirational “fantasy,” one wherein “depictions of the good life now appear to mark archaic expectations about having and building a life” (6). Describing the intention behind her book, Berlant states plainly: “At the center of the project, though, is that moral-intimate-economic thing called ‘the good life.’ Why do people stay attached to conventional good-life fantasies—say, of enduring reciprocity in couples, families, political systems, institutions, markets, and at work—when the evidence of their instability, fragility, and dear cost abounds?” (2). However, it is here, with notions of “the good life,” where the potential limits of Berlant’s project on the everyday and cruel optimism are exposed, given its failure to consider the colonial conditions of possibility for “the good life” as it is imagined by many settlers.

According to Chickasaw scholar Jodi Byrd, “Berlant avoids indigeneity even when it is a thematic concern within [her] text” (37). Indeed, she queries: “one might read [Berlant’s] delineations of cruel optimism as symptomatic of the very conditions she critiques. What constitutes the ordinary life in the overwhelmingly present moment for Berlant? And further, who gets to live that life?” (34). Phrasing it more bluntly, Byrd asks “Do Indians live the ordinary life in the contemporary now?” (37). If “the good life” is indeed “an attrition of a fantasy, a collectively invested form of life” (Berlant 11), we might ask, following Byrd, who are the desirers of this good life? Or, more precisely, who is it intended for, and who does she have in mind when she refers to it as a “fantasy?” In terms of some, though not all, Indigenous worldviews, the good life is a starting point, a foundational orienting epistemology informed by healthy kinship relations, and not an aspirational, fantastical telos as described by Berlant. In Cree, this process is described as *mîyo pimatisiwin*, translating roughly to ‘the good life’ or “seeking the good life” (LaBoucane-Benson et al., 6). Expanding upon this notion of *mîyo pimatisiwin*, Priscilla Settee (Cree) explains that “*pimatisiwin* . . . is taken from the root word

pimatisi, ‘to be alive’,” which is inflected by the modifier mîyo to mean “knowledge for community life, well-being, and sharing of values” (11). Guided by this principle of mîyo pimatisiwin, Settee asserts that “[i]ndividually and collectively people have, since time immemorial, been instructed by their teachings to strive and conduct themselves in ways that create positive relationships with our extended community” (11).

Similarly, Leanne Simpson outlines the tenets of mino bimaadiziwin, which translates roughly to ‘the good life’ in Anishnaabemowin. Elucidating these tenets, Simpson writes, “Nishnaabeg thought was designed and conceptualized to perpetuate the holistic well being of Nishnaabeg people through a series of cultural and political manifestations, including government, education, and restorative justice that promoted mino bimaadiziwin. Our ways of being promoted the good life or continuous rebirth at every turn: in the face of political unrest, ‘natural disasters’ and even genocide” (20). She continues that with “our Elders, our languages, and our lands, along with vision, intent, commitment, community and ultimately, action,” then Nishnaabeg peoples (and Indigenous communities more broadly) can “move ourselves beyond resistance and survival, to flourishing and mino bimaadiziwin” (Simpson, *Dancing*, 17). In her major follow up work, *As We Have Always Done*, Simpson expands on these notions, but situates them firmly within daily life: “One of the primary responsibilities and beautiful struggles of physically being Nishnaabeg is that we have to strive and commit to maintaining deep everyday relationships with this world when we are physically on the earth” (212). In so doing, Indigenous communities engage in “everyday acts of resurgence,” whereby “Indigenous peoples with radical imaginations and desires for freedom” coordinate with one another to “create collective, private physical spaces where [they] can come together and think very long and hard about how to organize and build resurgent movements, about how [they] move beyond everyday acts of

resurgence to collective actions in the short and long term, and about how to create community that embodies and practices our nation-based processes in the present” (Simpson 234).

Although Indigenous peoples have been attuned to the daily activities of survival and flourishing since time immemorial, increasingly Indigenous scholarship is taking up everyday life as a site of worthy analysis. Sarah Hunt, Leanne Simpson, Billy-Ray Belcourt, among others, have situated their analyses in the everyday, as the neglect of quotidian issues has resulted in the reification or reproduction of harmful practices, such as cis-heteropatriarchy, imposed masculinities, and other rigidly-enforced ways of being (and being Indigenous). To speak against these harmful practices is a form of resistance not only against settler colonialism, but also against the logics that have come to infiltrate and spread within Indigenous communities. In this way, “[e]veryday acts of resurgence are direct action” (Simpson, *As We’ve Always Done*, 236), as they are for the good of our communities more broadly and orient us more toward “the good life.”

Sarah Hunt and Cindy Holmes (2015) focus their attention on “decolonization at the level of interpersonal relationships, families and homes in order to highlight the intimate and everyday practices of allyship and decolonization that are often made invisible when we focus solely on social action strategies taking place in more ‘public’ spaces such as community coalitions” (156). Hunt and Holmes challenge what resistance looks like, especially the kinds of resistance obsessed over, or prized by, Indigenous studies and, in some cases, Indigenous communities more broadly. This is not to say, however, that these forms of resistance are any less valuable or desirable; in fact, it is quite the opposite – they are intimate and entangled forms of resistance that should be cultivated, as they are the relations that will spiral outwards and influence and shape the macropolitical projects in which Indigenous communities are involved (issues over the

land, the sovereignty of Indigenous nations, *et cetera*). For Hunt and Holmes, they highlight “the importance of lived, embodied and interpersonal engagement with decolonization in our everyday lives, rather than only academic reflection on these themes” (155-6). In many ways, “academic reflection” on the larger, putatively “more important” issues facing Indigenous communities can insulate community members from critique and allow them to be unaccountable to other members of the community, since they are engaged in the processes that will supposedly free all Indigenous peoples. These deflections demonstrate how, if Indigenous peoples do not ground their “decolonial strategies in the immediacy of Indigenous and Two-Spirit peoples’ daily lives at a local level, decolonization can become disconnected from the ongoing everyday manifestations of colonial power” (160). In a sense, then, we must practice our everyday and ongoing kinship relations as a central dimension of our larger decolonial projects, so that we can work to avoid reproducing the same matrices of colonial power relations within our own Indigenous communities, and so that we might continue to address these asymmetrical power imbalances as they have already taken shape in our lands and amongst our kin.

Chapter 3: Nikîkîwân:¹⁶ Contesting Settler Colonial Archives through Indigenous Oral History

“Kinship, like Fire, is about life and living; it’s not about something that is in itself so much as something we do—actively, thoughtfully, respectfully.”

—Daniel Justice (Cherokee Nation), “Go Away, Water! Kinship Criticism and the Decolonization Imperative”

“The logs were cut / And the house was raised / By pioneer men / in the olden days”
—James S. Tippet, “Old Log House,” qtd. in *Sodbusters*

In her editorial introduction to *Canadian Literature*’s “Indigenous Focus” special issue (2012), Margery Fee writes that “[g]iven that history lessons have tended to focus on Sir John A. Macdonald and the railway rather than Louis Riel and the buffalo, it’s not surprising that many Canadians don’t know much about Indigenous peoples in Canada” (6). Fee continues that Canadians, for the most part, have been “kept in the dark” (6). Recently a shift has occurred in Canada whereby greater attention has been paid to issues facing Indigenous peoples, ranging from (some, though not all) settler Canadians showing interest in the establishment and subsequent findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), to the Canadian courts’ recognition of the Tsilhqot’in Nation’s title to their ancestral homelands, and to a broader Canadian mainstream being forced to engage with wider social movements like Idle No More.

¹⁶ Nikîkîwân translates to “I went home” in Cree.

Increasingly, Canadian political, critical, and literary studies circles have acknowledged the need to affirm Indigenous voice within the discursive terrain of Canada's larger social-public spheres. Yet, however one feels about these incremental changes/movements, one baseline assertion Indigenous peoples continue to make is the need to pluralize this "Indigenous voice" – that is, to recognize the diversity and complexity of Indigenous voices in Canada.

While figures like Sir John A. Macdonald loom over Canadian history, it could also be argued that Louis Riel casts a large shadow over the multiple Indigenous histories in Canada. As more and more Canadians celebrate the various different provincial days dedicated to Louis Riel (Gaudry 66), more obscure though no less important peoples are sometimes lost in the narrative of Canada's relation (or lack thereof) to Indigenous peoples. Indigenous feminist scholars have constantly insisted on "the urgent need for scholars in and beyond indigenous studies to extend their reading and citational practices to include the length and breadth of indigenous women's writings and activism over the years," and beyond the dominating voices of Indigenous men not only historically but also within Indigenous studies scholarship itself ("An Open Letter," n.p.). Indeed, one need only look to the frequency with which eighteenth-century Kanien'keheka writer Joseph Brant is referenced compared to a writer like E. Pauline Johnson (Mohawk), with Brant having his writings catalogued and anthologized at a much higher frequency than Johnson, and Johnson receiving comparatively "little community support during her career" (Monture 82).¹⁷ Moreover, Joseph Brant's relative Molly Brant has yet to be received in quite the same

¹⁷ Monture (2014) attributes this lack of support to E. Pauline Johnson's "loyalist" tendencies and her conflating/negating Haudosaunee nationhood with the bolstering of Canadian nationalism, even though Brant himself was a loyalist and is often treated with a nuance not often accorded to figures like Johnson. For more on the complexity of a figure like E. Pauline Johnson, see Margery Fee's and Dory Nason's (2015) edited collection *Tekahionwake: E. Pauline Johnson's Writings on Native North America*.

way as her sibling, despite being a well-regarded and highly influential Mohawk matriarch as well as the wife of Sir William Johnson (British Superintendent of Indian Affairs), and arguably a far more important political figure than her brother. In this sense, it would seem that the only figures deemed worthy of inclusion into settler colonial, Canadian archives are those great (Indigenous) men of history, while others are left out entirely or their places within these histories minimized or willfully forgotten.

Settler colonial archives are often viewed by scholars, but also in some cases by a wider mainstream audience, as objective, impersonal containers of knowledge, housed in big buildings and comprised of knowledge(s) from academics, artists, and communities inside, but more often far away from, the site of knowledge consolidation and production itself (e.g., the university) (Adams-Campbell, Glassburn, Rivard, 2015; Griffith, 2018). States and/or their institutions act as “gatekeepers to the archive,” compiling information about a particular subject or topic, with the gatekeepers ultimately “controlling and mediating” *who* is privy to *what* information (Ghosh 29). Jane Griffith notes that “settler archives deploy collecting practices to obscure violence and land dispossession so as not to undermine the morality of their own state creation” (Griffith 2). Indeed, because of these practices, Zoe Todd (Métis) and Crystal Fraser (Gwich’in) insist on the need to “recognise archival spaces, especially state archives, for their original intent: to create national narratives that seek to legitimise the nation state by excluding Indigenous voices, bodies, economies, histories, and socio-political structures” (qtd. in Griffith 2).

In opposition to this mode of archival practice, Indigenous scholars, activists, and community members have not only introduced alternative ways of reading existing settler archives, but they have also articulated how to produce new archives, mostly by treating Indigenous peoples *in and of themselves* as knowledge holders and knowledge producers, even

when institutional gate-keepers dismiss them as inadequate or unreliable sources of intellectual activity and remembrance. As Anne Cvetkovich states, “part of the affective language that describes life under capitalism” (and, I would add, colonialism) is “how shock and injury are made socially meaningful, paradigmatic even, within cultural experience” (19). Of course, shock and injury are not the only means of cataloguing memories or experiences under colonialism, as joy and other emotions are nestled in the spaces and places that we call or have called home. Indeed, cultural experience prompts Indigenous peoples to supervene the conventional categories of collective memory in order to include affective, personal domains of intellectual and emotional knowledge production.

In the archives of settler nation-states like Canada, Indigenous peoples are often either absent, depicted as ciphers of the real individuals they are meant to represent, or presented as always already disappearing from the landscape. Yet the archives themselves also provide a means to trace how colonial “space is produced and productive,” and thereby enable us potentially to “unbury the generative roots of spatial colonization and lay bare its concealed systems” (Goeman 171). This unearthing is one way Indigenous peoples can enact “resurgent histories” (A. Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*, 107) to contest our erasure, assert our presence, and call upon an Indigenous archive of memories, including those held by elders and by the land itself, beyond what settler histories recognize or allow.

Therefore, this chapter is concerned with troubling the putative authority and objectivity of settler colonial archives (such as *Sodbusters*, examined below), with the affective and experiential archives of Indigenous individuals and communities, specifically that of my family and wider community. My primary intention with this piece is for my family history to problematize or come into contact/conflict with an existing archive to sketch the porous

boundaries where family histories and colonial narratives converge, and to demonstrate the limitations of existing settler archives and point to the immensity—but also the importance—of the challenge of “rereading, reframing, and reimagining” relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (Donald 5). Such work cannot be reduced to a protocol for reading settler archives or a scholarly practice for engaging Indigenous narratives, but rather requires a sustained and situated ethical and political commitment to “uproot” settler ways of knowing “that drive our everyday materialities and realities” (Goeman 170). Ultimately, this chapter considers how mainstream archives in colonial contexts are mobilized to make claims to particular spaces, while excluding, exhuming, or neglecting Indigenous peoples and communities’ stories of these histories from these same spaces, in an effort to diminish Indigenous claims to particular lands and geographies.

In response to these oversights and the tendency to address colonial elisions by incorporating well-known Indigenous peoples into the “great men of history” genre, I present here an abridged version of the history of my grandmother and great-grandfather. By putting selections of their life stories into conversation with a small-town archive, I seek to illuminate the everyday apparatus of settler colonialism, and the sacrifices that Indigenous peoples have had to make in order to survive in spite of them. Against a settler imaginary in which Indigenous peoples who move away from their ancestral homelands to townships or cities sever all ties with their land, extended family, communities, and ultimately, their Indigeneity, I introduce the story of my great-grandparents and grandmother, and the way their mobility was actually a reaffirmation of their Cree relations and responsibilities. Indeed, Indigenous peoples personal and familial migration has often been motivated by the desire to affirm sovereignty, agency, and traditional land relations (Borrows, 2009). As Daniel Justice writes, “Kinship, like Fire, is about

life and living; it's not about something that is in itself so much as something we do—actively, thoughtfully, respectfully” (3). The story and alternative (though entangled) archive I provide here depicts how my great-grandparents sought to preserve this fire of kinship in the face of colonial efforts to extinguish it.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter is concerned with unsettling and contesting the role of the small-town archive in the production of local knowledges and the consolidation of settler geographies, especially the ways in which these settler archives and their narratives of pioneer boosterism conflict with the narratives told by Indigenous elders in surrounding reserve communities. I read my grandmother's account of her displacement from the “Swan River Settlement” and from the township that would eventually come to be known as Kinuso, Alberta, in Treaty Eight territory. I present here what Dian Million has referred to as a “felt archive,” which offers “a narrative that appeals as a history that can be *felt* as well as intellectualized” and takes “down the barriers between the personal and the political” (59, emphasis original). Million notes that a “felt analysis” honours the complexity of lived experience under colonial conditions (54).¹⁸

Elaborating on the barriers posed to felt analysis, Million writes: “felt scholarship continues to be

¹⁸ Felt theory and felt archives have genealogies in other disciplines as well, with the work of archival, feminist critics like Ann Stoler's (2010) *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* being just one salient example. My intention for this chapter, however, is to outline the particularities of the felt theories that are articulated and enacted by Indigenous peoples in ways that critique, resist, and exceed settler colonial dynamics, and to hold space for the felt archives enunciated by Indigenous women, in particular my grandmother (who is neither an academic nor “theorist” in the conventional sense of these terms, and yet whose profound memories and utterances can shake the brittle walls of settler colonial archives that make claims to space). All of this is to say that while I acknowledge the histories of previous, (predominantly white) feminist contributions to felt archives, it is the felt archives of Indigenous women, and their experiences with settler colonialism, that interest me in this chapter.

segregated as a ‘feminine’ experience, as polemic, or at worst as not knowledge at all” (54). Important to note is the communal or collective aspect of these felt archives, as “[i]t is not just the individual that feels displacement, but also the community, who has lost a connection and it is for this reason that we must unmap settler spaces and find new ways to (re)map our communities” (Goeman 178-79). Thus, felt analyses help individuals to theorize their own experiences, but they are also produced in conversation with our larger collective cultural contexts (Million 61).

Felt theory puts forth its own archives, which often contest (whether directly or indirectly) those archives that are constructed according to settler colonial logics of history, settlement, and knowledge production. Given the conditions of its production, the decolonization of these latter archives may only ever be partial. Thus, this paper follows Indigenous feminists Crystal Fraser and Zoe Todd in their suggestion “that rather than decolonise the archives, the application of a decolonial sensibility is necessary to attend to the complex relationships between archives and Indigenous peoples” (n. pag.). A decolonial sensibility, they add, must go “deeper than simply digitising content or hiring Indigenous archivists. It also requires us to question how Indigenous peoples can meaningfully access, and *hold accountable*, the institutions running the nation’s archives” (Fraser and Todd n. pag., emphasis original).

Therefore, in keeping with the work of Fraser and Todd, I situate my grandmother’s narrative in relation to local history texts, specifically *Sodbusters: A History of Kinuso and Swan River Settlement* (1979), to locate the ways in which familial and colonial histories intersect and are embodied by community members of the Swan River First Nation. My account begins by detailing the life of my great-grandfather, August Sound, and how the policies of the Indian Act profoundly affected him and his descendants. I plot the historical trajectories of my grandmother

and great-grandfather to demonstrate how personal archives can illuminate the processes of settler colonialism in detailed and nuanced ways, and how these personal histories can contest the dominant narratives propagated by settler colonial imaginaries. This chapter will prioritize the “narrative history” of my grandmother while weaving this oral and experiential knowledge with theoretical and historical texts. The words of my grandmother are taken from an interview I conducted with her in 2011, as well as from many subsequent conversations “at the kitchen table” (Brooks 234).¹⁹ However, because not every conversation at the kitchen table is meant to be shared, I will outline briefly what this project will and will not do in relation to archives.

While I am interested in the way that official archives consolidate claims over space in a macro-political context, this paper will focus predominantly on the specific experience of my grandmother and that of the community from which she comes. Indeed, the micropolitical, everyday realm is where “Indigenous peoples’ resistance to colonialism ... unfold[s] in daily acts of embodying and living Indigeneity, honoring longstanding relationships with the land and with one another” (Hunt and Holmes 157). And as Sarah Hunt and Cindy Holmes assert, “[w]hile large-scale actions such as rallies, protests, and blockades are frequently acknowledged as sites of resistance, the daily actions undertaken by individual Indigenous people, families, and communities often go unacknowledged but are no less vital to decolonial processes” (157-58). Further, I aim to *show* rather than *tell* of the various ways in which the archive prioritizes particular knowledges and ideas about space and belonging over others. When one writes about

¹⁹ According to Lisa Brooks, the kitchen table is a space where “ideas are exchanged” and “where all the stories are made” (231). Brooks outlines how “the kitchen table” exists as a site of interpreting and carrying on the embodied knowledges (and archive) of our relations, writing that the kitchen table is a place for “gathering ... an activity that sustains us and our families” (244). We gather to exchange information and stories, to pass on histories and teachings, to “carefully consider knowledge of the landscape and our impacts on it” (244). For more on the analogy of the kitchen table see Brooks’ afterword to *American Indian Literary Nationalism* titled “At the Gathering Place.” See also David Gaertner’s book review in *Canadian Literature* entitled “Reconciliation at the Kitchen Table.”

the archive, one necessarily and unavoidably creates an archive in the process (via endnotes, footnotes, bibliographies, works cited lists). It is with this in mind that I refer to Sara Ahmed's idea(l) of citational practices, of creating a body of knowledge that does not rest on the laurels of the oft-cited and oft-repeated cadre of theorists. As Ahmed writes, citational practice is a "rather successful reproductive technology, a way of reproducing the world around certain bodies" (n. pag.). These citational practices form disciplines: "The reproduction of a discipline can be the reproduction of *these techniques of selection*, ways of making certain bodies and thematics core to the discipline, and others not even part" (Ahmed n. pag., emphasis original). Inspired by the work of Eve Tuck (Unangax), K. Wayne Yang, and Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, Daniel Justice refers to these as "citational relations," which is the practice of not "[a]lways citing the same small circle of voices," since this is "both harmful to the health of the field [of Indigenous studies] and disrespectful to the many fine scholars and writers whose work informs, enhances, challenges, and complicates our broader conversation" (*Why Indigenous Literatures*, 242). For Justice, constantly citing the same scholars is "a political choice that too often silences the less empowered and enfranchised, who are often the ones with the most trenchant understandings" (242).

With that said, the archive with which I engage here will be comprised necessarily and intentionally by not only the voices of my ancestors, but also by the voices of historically marginalized peoples akin to, but not necessarily the same as, those same ancestors. And while Gayatri Spivak and others may be skeptical of treating "'concrete experience' as the final arbiter" (168), this project is very much interested in the experiential knowledge of my grandmother and great-grandfather as a viable response to the settler archive—indeed, as (embodied) archives in and of themselves. As Glen Coulthard and Leanne Simpson have argued,

“elders are professors” (Ritskes n. pag.), and I contend that elders are also, in many cases, archives. That is to say, elders are viable keepers of Indigenous knowledge and history, ones that are often ignored as opposed to consulted as worthwhile knowledge holders. Elders offer up this knowledge not as an extractable resource, but rather as wisdom that, if listened to, might result in less harm done to themselves and their communities. That said, Elders’ stories are not immune from being treated as sites of extraction, and therefore even Indigenous scholars must be cautious about how we gain access to, and represent (or not) these stories. Indeed, part of my practice of disrupting traditional archives is to raise questions about the ethics of archiving, questions that are particularly pressing when the archive is a living person; the responsibilities here are relational, reciprocal, and informed by positionality and histories that exceed the individual person. Throughout this piece, I have made intentional choices to share particular elements of my family’s story and not others, as a means of asserting intellectual sovereignty and honouring my relations.

The fact that my family – as with many other Indigenous families today – does not fit neatly into settler Canadian archives is not, in itself, the point; the stories of how and why this is the case, and how this shapes and sometimes, breaks, our relationships and responsibilities to one another are what matters. To ask these questions I started by thinking about what they mean for my own relations, which is also where my interests in kinship obligations and everyday relations began. Although I spent the first decade of my life growing up on my reserve, I have spent a majority of my time alternating between urban and rural spaces, and thus have had an investment in the way the numerous relationships I sustain across space have unfolded over time – and, also, how they have been amplified or obscured by different settler colonial institutions. This movement between reserve and urban spaces has made me highly attuned to the different

obligations and responsibilities I hold in and to different spaces and communities, and how I should try to consistently honour these obligations. This movement also reflects my family history – in going back and forth from Swan River to nearby municipalities to Edmonton, I follow a familial pattern of movement first initiated by my grandmother and her parents.

I originally interviewed my grandmother for a final paper in an undergraduate course on space and belonging, and found the answers she provided to questions to be the beginning of an Indigenous felt archive rarely heard or sought after. After that first interview, my grandmother would proceed to add to this story, in a piecemeal fashion, at different family events. Ultimately, the story provided by my grandmother gave voice to a story not present in any print literature, so I decided, after asking her approval, to publish it so that it will exist as its own Indigenous felt archive, present within the settler colonial archives so intent on destroying these very same archives.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

My grandmother, Helen McRee (née Sound), was born July 13, 1937, at the Swan River Reserve in Northern Alberta. Helen was an only child born to August and Louise Sound, who spent most of her early childhood on her family's farmlands located in Swan River. Recalling her earliest memories of her life growing up on the farm, Helen proclaims: "I remember we had horses. My dad put me on a horse and he would walk the horse and I would ride. We had dogs, a couple of dogs, but not too many horses. We had cattle too, and chickens. We used to pick eggs, my mom and I. She used to go milk the cows, and I would go with her" (McRee).²⁰ In addition to

²⁰ The responses provided by Helen McRee have not been altered in any way, and were neither edited for content nor grammatical issues (except in cases where it would help make her narrative less ambiguous). My grandmother

raising cattle, Helen also recounts her father and others “threshing,” whereby they would “put bundles [of] wheat or barley into a machine... and make grain” (McRee). Describing her fondest memories of her life on the reserve/farm, Helen also recalls that every year “at treaty time” the family would “go riding on a wagon into town,” and nearby, Helen would watch her father and mother dance at pow wows (McRee). Treaty time, Helen clarifies, was when the members of the reserve/band received their annual allotment of five dollars from the government, and, in the case of her father August, a twenty-five-dollar allotment (treaty money payments remain at five dollars today, unaffected by inflation). The Sound family (August, Louise, and their daughter) lived on the farm until Helen became six years old, the age at which the law required her to attend residential school. However, instead of allowing Helen to be taken away to a residential school, my great-grandfather August and my great-grandmother Louise opted to give up their treaty rights and those of their daughter, leaving the reserve and moving to Kinuso, Alberta—a town adjacent to Swan River First Nation.²¹

also read and subsequently gave her permission to have this chapter appear as an article in *Canadian Literature*, as well as in this dissertation, as she feels that the history of her family should be documented in a good way.

²¹ The distinctions between status and non-status Indians, or treated and non-treated Indians, having to attend residential school is complicated, especially given the different historical, geographical, and jurisdictional contexts. Given that the federal government viewed itself as having duties primarily to status Indians on reserves, non-status and/or “halfbreed” students fell into the jurisdictional hands of either the province or territories. While the Indian Act did stipulate that “halfbreed” or non-status Indians could not attend schools on reserve, a number of provincial and territorial day, industrial, and residential schools opened with the intention of schooling those students not admissible to “federal institutions,” or students the federal government did not want to have to provide “services” for. However, the federal government did attempt to force non-status and “halfbreed” students into federally funded residential schools if enrolment numbers for status Indians were low, but “the federal government’s admission policy for Métis and “non-status Indian” students at residential schools had been inconsistent and disorganized” (Niessen, 48), and “[t]he federal government[’s] position on the matter was constantly shifting” (*TRC Executive Summary*, 65). In the case of my grandmother, she would have entered a public school at a time when, the “Indian Affairs residential school system, starved for funding for fifteen years, was on the verge of collapse,” and thus the federal government increasingly encouraged the process of integration of non-status Indian and Métis students into public schools (while residential schools remained operational for status Indian children), a move that was “opposed by some of the church organizations” as they still felt they could civilize non-status and “halfbreed” children in church-run schools (*TRC Executive Summary*, 68).

According to the small-town archive *Sodbusters: A History of Kinuso and Swan River Settlement*, written by Jean Quinn,²² August Sound was born “on January 10, 1904 in the Kinuso area” of Alberta (60). Kinuso exists as a rural “village and the centre of the Swan River Valley,” and its name is “of Cree origin meaning fish” (2). Initially, the Swan River Valley—was known as “Wapisew Sepi,” but upon the arrival of settlers was renamed to its English translation, “Swan River” (1). August Sound originally served as a headman for his community and then “was a councillor for the Swan River Band,” eventually “bec[oming] its first chief in 1936” (61). A year after becoming the chief of Swan River, August’s daughter Helen, my grandmother, was born. Detailing August’s responsibilities as chief, Quinn, head researcher for the town archive, writes: “As a chief, it was August’s duty to distribute food and clothing rations to the people. He organized the hand games and tea dances for the first of July celebrations. He also held dances at the U.F.A. Hall” (61). August was chief of the Swan River First Nation until 1943, at which time he and Louise left the reserve and relinquished their treaty rights so their daughter would not have to experience the conditions August faced as a child at a nearby residential school—or, put more succinctly, my great-grandparents (in)voluntarily enfranchised themselves in order to preserve their kinship relations.²³

When my grandmother describes the conditions that her father experienced at residential school, she recollects with palpable disdain that he “had a few stories, like nuns hit[ting] him

²² Like many archives, *Sodbusters* itself is an archive as well as a narrative produced through multiple different archives. The important point is that *Sodbusters* is presented as a “history” comprised of, and consolidated by, predominantly settler archival materials.

²³ I would like to thank Tasha Hubbard for helping me to think of my great-grandfather’s actions in these terms (i.e. [in]voluntary enfranchisement). While in theory the underside of my great-grandparents’ enfranchisement into the Canada nation-state was disenfranchisement in terms of political membership in their nation, I think of their abdicating from their community as a sort of temporary “suspension,” not only because of the ties to family and land that my grandmother maintains were still in place after they left, but because, after the passage of Bill C-31, my great-grandparents and grandmother were welcomed back into the community, having regained both Indian status (less important in terms of kinship) and membership into the band.

over the head with a ruler or hit[ting] his hands—they were mean” (McRee). My grandmother calmly added that “children got abused,” noting that the residential schools would “take your Cree away” (McRee). Relating the conditions of her family and the duress placed on her father, Helen explains:

When I turned six [my dad] gave up his treaty rights because, in those years, the commission and the federal government would come and take your kids away as soon as you were six and put you in a mission. My dad did not want me to go to a mission because he was there when he was a kid, and he said it was not for him. He had to give up his rights and move into town. He had to give up his farm, because he could not live on the reserve. (McRee)²⁴

Up until August Sound enrolled Helen at the Kinuso public elementary school in 1943, Helen had only spoken Cree, but after her enrolment she “spoke mostly English at home ... which is why [she] cannot speak Cree now” (McRee). August and Louise Sound predominantly spoke English at home to help facilitate Helen’s learning of the language so she would be teased less at school, limiting her contact with the Cree language and, inadvertently and ironically, contributing to the language loss she still mourns. In effect, this language loss resulted in a broader “taking her Cree away.”

ORAL VS. WRITTEN ARCHIVES

²⁴ I am reminded of a similar story of fleeing to avoid residential schooling provided by Rachel Flowers in her article “Refusal to Forgive: Indigenous Women’s Love and Rage,” wherein she writes: “My mother grew up in the city after my grandmother took her kids off the reserve and hid them from being taken to residential schools” (46). In another, though similar, vein, Robert Alexander Innes details how Indigenous peoples were forced to enfranchise through a variety of means and due to a multitude of reasons: “my grandfather was forced to enfranchise (i.e., give up his legal status as a federally recognized Indian) by an Indian agent named Kurby because he ... was agitating for change on the reserve” (4).

My grandmother encouraged me to locate an edition of the archival text *Sodbusters* with the idea that it would elucidate further the history of my great-grandparents, and I could potentially corroborate her account with “written evidence.” The implication here, and to echo Million, is that the knowledge put forth by elders, especially Indigenous women elders, is not viewed as “knowledge at all,” and this narrative is so pervasive as to make Indigenous peoples feel this way about themselves, even when these experiences have affected them directly. Although *Sodbusters* was commissioned by the community of Kinuso to represent the town and its surrounding populations accurately according to available archives, the many biases as well as absences within the text (whether intentional or not) are salient. Originally established to celebrate the 75th anniversary of Alberta in 1980, *Sodbusters* was produced by a committee featuring members from the area known as the Swan River Settlement. The credits to *Sodbusters* list researchers, proofreaders, typists, photo editors, co-editors, and the primary editor, Jean Quinn. While the text was intended to celebrate the “accomplishments” of the Kinuso/Swan River Settlement area, it also functions as an archive that consolidates settler claims to the territory and history of the Swan River Valley.

There are many instances throughout the *Sodbusters* archive that naturalize colonization and settlement, including the paratext. In a note before the preface of the book, then Progressive Conservative Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta (MLA), Larry Shaben, writes: “It is not at all surprising that many early Albertans settled in the beautiful Swan River Valley ... The rich soil, so suitable to the growth of the healthy livestock industry, must have been a welcome sight to the early pioneers who struggled into the North” (*Sodbusters* n. pag.). Shaben continues,

In today's era of modern conveniences and plenty, it is only proper that we reflect upon the hardships endured by the pioneers in building this land of ours. To the writers and the contributors to this volume, I extend congratulations for recognizing the outstanding achievements of those who helped pave the way for a better life for future generations. (*Sodbusters* n. pag.)

Unsurprisingly, and in keeping with the rest of the text, Shaben omits the long histories of violence that subtend these histories of booster-esque "settlement." These accounts are written in ways that suggest the history of a place began once settlers arrived, naturalizing *terra nullius* and erasing thousands of years of Indigenous histories and relations. Additionally, the pronoun "ours" reaffirms the sense of ownership and property extending from hearty pioneers to the current white settlers of the Kinuso township. Primary archivist Quinn echoes Shaben's rhetoric of "taming the North," writing in the preface: "This book is dedicated to the early enterprising pioneers and their families. Through their untiring efforts, united with community spirit and co-operation, they battled the elements with a minimum of essentials ... We would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the many people who have recorded and preserved our past, honoring our forefathers and pioneers" (Quinn, n. pag.).

As Daniel Coleman has remarked, the imagery of rugged (predominantly male) Canadians braving the elements and settling the North has a long history in a variety of Canadian texts, from popular literature, to everyday items such as brochures (24). At work in this rhetoric of the "rugged" pioneer are echoes of R.G. Haliburton's assertion that the men of the north are "a hardy, a healthy, a virtuous, a daring, and a dominant race" (103). Implicit in Haliburton's statement is the ascription of "men of the north" to a race that is predominantly white. Since the men of the north are not discouraged in the face of harsh temperatures, the pioneers' hard-fought

struggle to remain on cold “deserted” land works to legitimize the dispossession of Indigenous others. Nicholas Blomley notes “the importance of settler stories ... as self-justifying accounts, told by a colonial people” (115). Although it may be easy to dismiss works like Haliburton’s “The Men of the North and Their Place in History” as racist rhetoric, it is worth investigating how the language of *Sodbusters* echoes the narratives of settler dominance that such writers employ. *Sodbusters* repeatedly exalts “the years of great expansion” by settlers into the Swan River Valley, and the ambition of “white settlers in seeking virgin lands of gold and furs” (Quinn 80). The resulting mythic history naturalizes an ideal of Canada as yielding “an abundance of free land,” whereupon the attributes of “hardness, strenuousness, endurance ... so vital to dominance” could be developed and perpetuated into the future (Berger 18). When *Sodbusters* does provide minimal space for Indigenous peoples and histories, the information is often insufficient, inaccurate, or, at best, truncated. For example, while chapter 2 is written primarily on “Pioneers,” it is preceded by the (oxymoronic named) prelude entitled “Early Native Pioneers with No Recorded History.” This brief section comprises one page and includes nine names listed at the bottom, a brief reprieve before the eighty pages of (white) pioneer history that follows in the chapter.

Depicting Cree ceremonial habits and customs such as the “Tea Dance,” *Sodbusters* reads:

They will build a large bonfire and hang a pail of tea and water on to brew; this is kept on all night. To one side of the fire, two and sometimes three, or even four Indian men, will sit and play the drums. Anyone wishing to dance will form a circle around the fire and do a sort of side shuffle, all the while singing a kind of crooning song. It sounds like the wind blowing through the trees. [We] used to

think there were no words to the singing, but there are “Cree” words especially for funerals when they bury their dead, and, at their marriages. (339)

The use of the pronoun “they” establishes a hierarchical settler-Indigenous dichotomy in the text that persists throughout the book. While the text purports to include the broader community of the Swan River First Nation and Kinuso settlement, the many Cree families are routinely referred to as “they” in the text, in a sense designating them as out of place and naturalizing the space as one of white settlement—a space hospitable to the mostly white “we” occupying the Kinuso township. In effect, *Sodbusters* takes on an almost ethnographic style when discussing Cree people: “When anyone gets tired of dancing, they slide out of the circle of dancers and drink tea from the ‘cup of friendship’ that others have used, and more dancers will join the circle. The very old people who are too old to dance will sit on the side lines around the fire also drinking ‘tea’ and smoking their pipes ‘of peace’ ... As the years go by, one seldom hears the sound of the drums and the enchanting voices of the ‘Indians’ singing” (339). The forlorn tone of this passage highlights the imagined inevitability of the disappearance of Indigenous peoples—here an abstraction, but in real terms my community and my family—while obfuscating the role of settler violence in provoking the supposed vanishing of these “enchanting voices” (339). Inexplicably, the section from which these passages are taken ends with the subheading “Joke” and is followed by what must have been, to the writer, a homey, well-worn lark. This does not, however, blunt its obvious racism or the fact that it undercuts the preceding expression of sadness at seeing Indigenous peoples disappear: “When the white men first put up telephone wires across the country, the Indians said, ‘White man fool, cows go under fence’” (339). Aside from the prolonged engagement with “The Tea Dance,” explicit references to Indigeneity in *Sodbusters* are few and far between, with one of the only other examples being the shockingly

curt declaration, “In 1918, the flue [sic] epidemic took approximately half the Indian population” (Quinn 2), which is left unelaborated as the text moves on to other matters. The passivity of the sentence which isolates influenza as the main cause of Indigenous material and social death – and which fails to register that community immune responses were compromised by malnutrition and other health impacts of colonization, thus making them more susceptible to death by disease – functions to naturalize Indigenous disappearance, a central yet unacknowledged theme throughout the text.

The account given of August Sound in *Sodbusters* states that he held the position of chief for “10 years,” and thereafter “August quit Treaty in 1946” (Quinn 61). The colonial conditions surrounding August’s relinquishment of “Treaty” are not mentioned at all, and he is described as simply “mov[ing] to Assineau, [a small town in Alberta], and work[ing] on the railroad” (Quinn 61). This account, however, exists in opposition to the oral account provided by my grandmother, wherein she dates August’s (and Louise’s) departure from the reserve to 1943, the year she would have been forced by law to attend residential school.²⁵ The text also provides no mention of the residential schools in the area and yet has an entire chapter devoted to the Kinuso public elementary, thereby ignoring a large proportion of the people it purports to represent (Quinn 87).²⁶ Numerous members of the Swan River First Nation attended one of the nearby

²⁵ This assertion is buoyed by the fact that my great-grandfather’s name also vanishes from Treaty Annuity Paylists at this time.

²⁶ This is not to say that there were no “critiques” in the *Sodbusters* archive. In a long section, “submitted by” Cheryl Sheldon and Ruby Sound entitled “The Cree,” a more or less conventional description of Cree cultural practices is provided (Quinn 2). Yet, in brief moments, Sheldon and Sound provide sentences that clash with the overarching narrative of the Swan River Settlement. After describing the “traditional” lifestyle(s) and practices of the Cree, Sheldon and Sound end the description as follows: “Today the children of the hunting Cree have two lives to live. Their home is oriented to hunting, trapping and fishing while they go to school in a white urban center. It is hard for them to continue the two and it has caused many problems for them. This is heightened by the fact that many attend boarding schools.” This mention of “boarding schools” is the only direct reference to residential schools in the entire text, despite the *Sodbusters* book having an entire chapter on “Schools” (Quinn 87). Further, Sheldon and Sound, after describing the Treaty (Eight) processes of the area, proceed to write that “[s]ince the Treaty was signed, the

residential schools in Northern Alberta, predominantly in Grouard, Jousard, or Lesser Slave Lake. The omission of residential schools produces a white washed history of the Swan River and Kinuso settlements and Treaty Eight area more broadly. Although the text was funded in an attempt to provide evidence of the accomplishments of the families and businesses within the Kinuso area, the lack (or distortion) of Indigenous representation reproduces colonial narratives that naturalize settler presence and Indigenous erasure.

Furthermore, the mislabelled photographs throughout *Sodbusters* and the inaccurate attendant annotations betray the instability of the written archive, while attesting to the value of oral histories provided by people like my grandmother.²⁷



Louise Sound and daughter Helen standing beside their log house in 1939.

The photograph above is dated 1939 in the text, which would be two years after my grandmother was born (Quinn 61). I showed this photograph to my grandmother and she verified the “log

hunting and fishing rights have been curtailed by the government. Also the government is trying to do away with the other rights and promises that were set out in the Treaty” (Quinn 8).

²⁷ All photographs courtesy of *Sodbusters: A History of Kinuso and Swan River Settlement*. Kinuso: Swan River Valley Region, 1979.

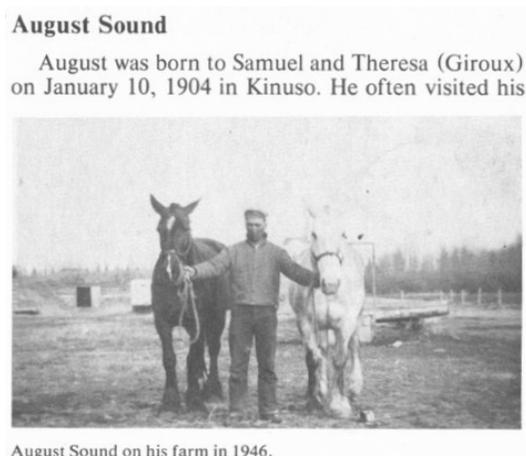
house” in the picture as the farm house in which she grew up—the dog’s name, if the reader is curious, was Sport.



However, the next photograph of my grandmother in the collection is with “Father Kinderwater” and is dated as 1938, making my grandmother one year old (Quinn 81), which is clearly not the case. When I showed this to my grandmother, she stated that the person in the photograph resembles one of the girls with whom she grew up. In this instance, the ability of Indigenous bodies, especially girls’ bodies, to be read as so similar as to be substitutable for one another is troubling, and mirrors broader issues of the replaceability of Indigenous bodies in colonial texts and environments. These erasures and the implied exchangeability of Indigenous women and girls in settler colonial contexts are symptomatic of the “systemic neglect, racism and violence of legal indifference within a society largely run by white men,” and these elisions “contribut[e] to the normalization of violence against [Indigenous women]” (Hunt n.p.). Anishinaabe scholar Dory Nason roots these erasures in a settler colonial hatred of Indigenous women and the love they show in and for their communities. She writes, “Mobilizing this hate seems alarmingly easy in the popular consciousness. Indigenous women have always known of its presence and the violence it provokes ... Violence against Indigenous women is so normalized in settler society, it even becomes a category of desire in the public consciousness ... Even in popular so-called

homages to our womanhood, violence and sexual degradation saturate the picture” (n.p.) In *Sodbusters*, Indigenous women and girls, like my great-grandmother Louise or my grandmother Helen, are conveniently left out of the text or disappeared from it, stripped of their name, their particular history, and their situatedness in relation to the rest of their family and community. Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson describes the State’s (and its citizens’) ability to ‘disappear’ Indigenous women and girls as “consistent with the ongoing project of dispossession,” as an inherent and fundamental condition and feature of Canadian forms of settler statecraft and governance (“The State is a Man,” 15). Additionally, the body itself is an acute site of dispossession for Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit peoples, a site which Indigenous feminists have repeatedly emphasized and politicized as a way in which intimate scales of sovereign authority are enacted and articulated, but also one subject to multiple forms of violence (direct, physical, symbolic).

Further, the inaccuracy of *Sodbusters* as Kinuso’s primary archival text is displayed again in its representation of my great-grandfather, August:



Although the date of the photograph shown here is 1946, my grandfather lost his farmlands in 1943 when he (in)voluntarily enfranchised, which suggests that the purported date of the picture

is incorrect. I am not arguing that the contributors and editors of *Sodbusters* intentionally “distorted” the history of my great-grandparents and grandmother, but rather that they did not treat this area of history (i.e., of the first chief of the Swan River First Nation) with the due diligence and respect that it deserves. Further, the presence of my great-grandmother Louise in the text is marginal, and she is only referenced in her proximity to August and her father.²⁸ More to the point, these mistakes are symptomatic of the way Canadian institutions treat Indigenous peoples and handle Indigenous histories and knowledges more broadly. The *Sodbusters* archive, then, can be understood as an effort by town boosters to document its hardy pioneer histories, consolidate claims to lands in the area, and potentially garner support for the transformation of Kinuso from a small town into a bustling urban centre, an effort which never quite materialized, in large part because the town is ‘inconveniently’ surrounded by reserve land. Since this geographic fact is a product of its particular history, supposedly historical documents like *Sodbusters* are perhaps a source and symptom of the town’s ongoing insecurity about its own colonial claims. The boosterism that has taken place within towns that aspire but fail to become urban centres demonstrates a particular anxiety about the underlying precarity of colonial claims in the face of ongoing Indigenous presence, which differs in important ways from the surety of larger, more established cities. Indeed, in many ways it appears as though settler boosterism rather than careful historiography is the whole point of the archival project, with Indigenous peoples existing as inconvenient items included out of self-serving benevolence, instead of out of an earnest preoccupation with the entangled histories of the area. Thus, the multiple inaccuracies regarding Indigenous content in the written archival text highlight the importance of oral

²⁸ The absence of my great-grandmother Louise throughout the text is worthy of a paper in and of itself, given its gendered, political, and historical implications, and something I plan to work on as a future project.

histories, not only as alternatives to the inconsistencies in the narratives settlers often tell of themselves, but also as valuable historical texts that make claims to spaces of belonging that assert long-held notions of Indigenous community.

“SMALL GIFTS OF WISDOM”: AGENCY, VOICE, REFUSAL

The emerging recognition of the necessity of addressing the past and present of settler colonialism in Canada involves multiple complexities and contradictions. Because different kinds of conversations—“unsettling” conversations—must occur if any shift in the colonial relation is to take place, questions about “how” and “on whose terms” become extremely important (Eigenbrod 17). Before anything else, my grandmother’s story is a gift that nurtures the health of our kinship relations, extending to our ancestors, our living relatives, and our relatives yet to come. As Leanne Simpson states, stories are “small gifts of wisdom, but they only have power if the ones that hear those stories, embody them and act” (“RBC Taylor”). To be a good relation, one does not treat such gifts lightly.²⁹ As Sami scholar Rauna Kuokkanen’s writes, “the gift is integral to many indigenous worldviews and philosophies, which emphasize individual and collective responsibility for preserving the balance of the socio-cosmic order” (7). The gift is “grounded in an understanding of the world that is rooted in intricate relationships that extend to everyone and everything,” and “[b]ecause of these relationships, this [gift] logic emphasizes reciprocation with and responsibility toward all others” (7). Acknowledging such gifts, non-Indigenous peoples may begin “to question ... predominant values” and begin to conceive of an “alternative to the current [social, political, economic] paradigm of greed, self-

²⁹ And there are certain protocols around when, where, and with whom one may share such stories. These protocols far exceed the requirements imposed by university ethics committees, or disciplinary practice. They are also culturally specific, wherein those of one community will not be the same as another, adding to the complexity.

interest, and hyper-individualism” (24). Indeed, to Kuokkanen, the gift “offers a compelling framework for envisioning alternative approaches to structuring and producing knowledge” (8).³⁰ Kuokkanen ultimately argues that “the gift can also serve as a critique of the present day’s neoliberal, capitalist, and patriarchal structures, and as such can form the basis for an alternative paradigm,” an alternative way of being and orienting one’s self in the world (8).

Treating stories as gifts also means confronting the danger that our stories will be used against us, whether through whitewashed incorporation of representations of Indigenous peoples back into settler narratives, or through a re-enactment of dehumanization at the very moment that historical violence is revealed. These tendencies have led critics like Audra Simpson to advocate the need for Indigenous peoples to consciously engage in moments of “ethnographic refusal” (*Mohawk Interruptus*, 95), or what Saidiya Hartman has referred to as “narrative restraint” (14), when revisiting the archive with the intention of composing a counter-historical project. It is clear that efforts to share Indigenous stories with broader audiences come with both risk and possibility, and it is my ongoing responsibility to negotiate this challenge in a “good way” (L. Simpson 20).

Settlement, in the archive, is often presented as something that is always already coming into being, just as Indigenous peoples are often presented as always already disappearing. I have shared these particular excerpts of my grandmother’s story first and foremost as a means to honour that story and to assert our family’s presence and our ancestral and ongoing kinship ties to the land that is currently known as Swan River. In the process, her story offers an important

³⁰ While I do not have the space to go into the possibilities and (potential) limitations of “the gift” as a philosophical concept here, it is worth noting that it has a long lineage in both Indigenous and Euro-Western philosophies, as well as other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, among others.

interruption of the idea that settlement is complete, contesting the often taken-for-granted authority of the official archive. Beyond simply contesting the accuracy of dates and names, and pointing to the tactical absence of Indigenous peoples, this story leads to larger questions about the social function of archives in settler states. Historical accounts often purport to document events as they unfold linearly through time and space. This tendency projects an inevitability, a history of the present that could not have been any other way, foreclosing a critical examination of colonialism as an active and ongoing project. As Fraser and Todd suggest, when “Indigenous people are present in historical records, they are often depicted as passive bystanders, rarely free agents in their own right and far removed from narratives that highlight agency or sophistication” (n. pag.). Indeed, in the narrative of the *Sodbusters* text, there is no place for a complex or nuanced account of my great-grandparents and the difficult choices they made in an effort to preserve kinship relations and protect their daughter from the harms of residential schooling. Yet, as my grandmother’s story about her father and mother attests, they acted within the small space of possibility circumscribed by the colonial state. Ojibwe scholar Scott Lyons might refer to a movement such as this as an “x-mark,” as a “coerced sign of consent made under conditions that are not of one’s making,” signifying both “power and a lack of power, agency and a lack of agency” (2-3). For Lyons, an x-mark refers to the way in which some communities signed treaties under duress and coercion, marking or signaling their “agreement” to treaty negotiators with the mark of an x on paper or parchment. Elaborating on his theory of an x-mark further, Lyons continues: “It is a decision one makes when something has already been decided for you, but it is still a decision. Damned if you do, damned if you don’t. And yet there is always the prospect of slippage, indeterminacy, unforeseen consequences, or unintended results; it is always possible, that is, that an x-mark could result in something good” (3).

Is my great-grandparents' choice an example of "agency" within a circumscribed grammar or language, an act akin to an x-mark, or what Million describes as the movements made by our loved ones to avoid "those states that consumed them" (Million 76)? Or do we need a new vocabulary that can properly attend to lived Indigenous histories of resistance under colonization? How might my great-grandparents' decision to take extreme measures in the face of violent colonial conditions teach us something about the strength of Indigenous peoples' commitment to "keep the fire" of our kinship relations (Justice 2)? Any effort to find definitive answers to these questions will likely be met with frustration, yet even the ability to ask them opens up alternative readings of history that in turn create the possibility of alternative futures and decolonial horizons.

CULTIVATING DECOLONIAL SENSIBILITIES

By identifying the inaccuracies and elisions in the official archive of Kinuso history, I have sought in this chapter to document what Dwayne Donald calls an Indigenous "pentimento," whereby "Indigenous history and memory begins to show through in the 'official' history of Canada" (Donald 23). This Indigenous history and memory has been presented as a "felt analysis," one that is routinely dismissed as too subjective for the empirical expectations of academia. Million elaborates:

academia repetitively produces gatekeepers to [Indigenous women's] entry into important social discourses because we feel our histories as well as think them. How is it that our oral traditions and our literary and historical voices are suppressed? What are the arguments that have been used to reduce what we say to the margins of public and academic discourse in the United States and Canada?

Our voices are still positioned in a particular way, definitely reminiscent of the past silences we know so well, contingent to our colonized position now. (54)

A felt analysis can be one way to depict what Saidiya Hartman notes as “a history of the present [that] strives to illuminate the intimacy of our experience with the lives of the dead, to write our now as it is interrupted by this past” (4). As I have hoped to make apparent with my grandmother’s story, our *nows* are always interrupted by the peoples and places that precede us. These disruptions lead to knowledges inflected by and produced through feeling and experience, of an understanding that exceeds the parameters of the state-sanctioned stories that are continually told and retold to naturalize the settler nation state.

What I have offered is one history of a marginalized chief and, perhaps more importantly, an awareness of the often neglected traumas and turmoil engendered by residential schools and displacement. I am taken back to the resonant phrase uttered by my grandmother: they would “take my Cree away.” In this story, there are multiple instances in which Indigenous people were at risk of having their Cree language taken away, including both through forced enrolment in residential schools where speaking Indigenous languages was forbidden and through the ironic loss of Cree through the attempt to adapt to and ultimately survive in relation to and in spite of the dominant (settler) culture. And we can identify a triple loss as the small-town settler archive proves unable (or unwilling) to tell the history that it purports to know (or, at the very least, misrepresents that it knows) and once again erases a family and a larger cultural history. If we consider the complexity of this one simple story, it is staggering to imagine just how many erasures are at work in other stories across Canada and Turtle Island more broadly.

Importantly, Indigenous peoples’ recounting of our own histories demonstrates “our ability to speak to ourselves, to inform ourselves and our generations, to counter and intervene in

a constantly morphing colonial system” (Million 54). “To ‘decolonize,’” Million continues, “means to understand as fully as possible the forms colonialism takes in our own times” (54-55). Although my grandmother was fortunate enough to avoid attending residential school, the effects of the near-destruction of her and her parents’ culture still manifest themselves in the lives of her children and grandchildren. As Jim Silver succinctly states, the “residential school experience is intergenerational and pervasive” (22). The stories of Helen’s children’s and grandchildren’s lives, however, are not my stories to share, and are instances when narrative restraint and processes of refusal are at their most necessary. And while I believe the narrative of my grandmother and great-grandparents is important to tell, it is also necessary to recognize that “[n]o situation is ‘innocent’ of a violence of form, if not content, in narrating a history or a present for ourselves” (A. Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*, 99). To return to Million, routinely “[w]omen and men who chose to speak their experience often reveal social distress that has been equated with individual pathology. The mainstream white society read[s] Native stories through thick pathology narratives” (Million 56). Eve Tuck points out that mainstream narratives of Indigenous peoples tend to be “damage-centred,” framing Indigenous communities “as sites of disinvestment and dispossession [...] saturated in the fantasies of outsiders” (412). In response to this, the assertion of a “communal memory,” Goeman notes, “[is] necessary to escape the trap of colonialism as ‘tragic figures’” (Goeman 186). In the telling of these narratives we must resist the narrativization that results in tragic figures, characterizations that paint a reductive view of history and obscure the historical resistances and present vibrancy of Indigenous communities. In this way, we are able to “begin shifting the discourse away from damage and toward desire and complexity” (Tuck 422).

I used the term (in)voluntary enfranchisement above to characterize August and Louise's effort to preserve kinship relations through refusal of the formal mechanisms of colonial recognition that would have required Helen's enrolment in a residential school. This decision, no doubt a difficult one, was not made in abstraction, but rather as an act of Indigenous resistance and reaffirmation in the context of an impossible colonial imposition, with the full knowledge of sacrifice and loss that would also accompany the decision. Furthermore, Louise and August's actions were not only maintaining kinship relations in their time, but for their descendants as well. Hoping to maintain ties to their daughter, August and Louise Sound gave up what little material wealth they had, contested the colonial authority of the state, and invested in the ongoing practice of Cree kinship relations, even though this meant leaving their territory and moving to the growing municipality of Kinuso and eventually Edmonton.

CODA / CONCLUSION: READING WITH AND AGAINST CANADA # 150

Difficult narratives prompt Saidiya Hartman to ask: "What are the stories one tells in dark times? How can a narrative of defeat enable a place for the living or envision an alternative future?" (14). I have worked to transcribe the trajectory of my family's history as a means to honour my grandmother and our other relations. I consider it part of this work to counter the dominant narratives of state- and civic-sponsored archives and chart new ways forward by presenting alternative stories. As Jo-Ann Episkenew notes, "Everyday stories...have transformative powers, but they must first implicate the audience before transformation can occur" (15). It is not lost on me that the onus for unsettling colonial narratives is often placed on Indigenous peoples. It is far less common for settlers to offer an account of how they and their families actively engaged in and benefitted from processes of displacement, dispossession, and

settlement, or to consider their own place in the Indigenous stories they have heard. This results in an uneven distribution of labour in the process of transformation—intellectual, affective, and political.

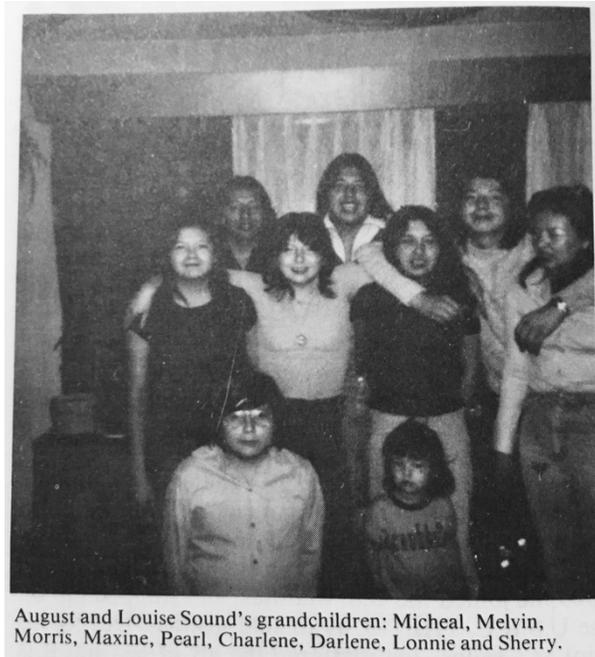
In particular, Indigenous peoples are often expected to perform for settler audiences a rehearsal of their own traumas in ways that can be comfortably consumed and incorporated into existing Canadian national myths. When Indigenous stories are not packaged in this way, settlers often respond defensively or dismissively, unable to grapple with the destabilization of those myths, and unable to conceptualize what might be crafted in their place. To return to the editorial introduction to *Canadian Literature's* “Indigenous Focus” special issue, Margery Fee quotes Thomas King’s well-known phrase about the necessity and circulation of stories: “Take it. [The story is] yours. Do with it what you will. But don’t say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You’ve heard it now” (qtd. in Fee 10). And while I must adamantly refuse that anyone come to call the specific story of my grandmother and great-grandfather their own, it is necessary to recognize how this one story is emblematic of the larger narrative of Canada, a narrative wherein settlers become great pioneers, and Indigenous people ghosts (Boyd & Thrush, 2011; Tuck & Ree, 2013).

Rather than start with kinship and its relations to space as abstract concepts, I began with *lived* kinship relations, and how these unfold in their full complexity across material and epistemological space. What this chapter has attempted to do is, in trying to make sense of patterns of personal and familial migration, look to how competing archives produce space and how they assign meaning to the histories and the familial and community relations therein. Further, it has been an attempt to outline how these histories help to naturalize colonial settlement and Indigenous replacement in a specific context, but one that can be generalized and

thought of more broadly as the ongoing project of settler colonialism in Canada. Though *Sodbusters* was published in 1979, similar booster-esque rhetoric was clearly echoed in Canada's 150th Anniversary celebrations. In a 2017 op-ed in the *Globe and Mail* entitled "Canadians should not be ashamed of their history" historian J.L. Granatstein gleefully stated that "Canada's success, Canada's glory, has come about because we remain firmly part of Western Civilization ... our civilization left us a legacy of which we can and should be proud" (n.p.). The issues of who Granatstein includes in that "we" (and who may have and continue to be excluded by it today) are not broached at all in the op-ed, and neither is the cost of Canada's "Western Civilization." The ongoing pervasiveness of these colonial patterns foreground the continued need to engage in what Renate Eigenbrod described as "unsettling conversations" about the need to decolonize literary and cultural texts (160). Part of engaging these "unsettling conversations" is looking to the role of colonization in producing both material and imaginative spaces, and Indigenous peoples' dispossessions from these environments. Further, it entails examining the role of Indigenous resistance and survivance in spite of these displacements, and shows how these areas become troubled when we centre Indigenous kinship relations.

Ultimately, the narrative offered by my grandmother about her and my great-grandparents' history traces their trajectories of migration across the colonially-imposed borders of reserve lands to urban environments, with the primary goal of keeping kinship relations intact and adhering to their right to travel as Cree peoples throughout these spaces and the broader geography of what is currently called Canada (to honour not only their relations to each other but to the land itself). My grandmother would make her final move to amiskwacîwâskahikan (or Edmonton) from Kinuso in 1963 because her husband was suffering from tuberculosis. That

same year my mother was born, and Helen had to provide for seven children while her husband Max was said to be “dying in the hospital” (McRee).



Max spent two years in the hospital before his eventual release, and at that time Helen (with the help of her “mom and dad”) was able to provide for her family (McRee). When I ask my grandmother if she ever misses our home territory, she said that in 1963, she was “too busy” just trying to survive to be worrying about her reserve. But today she feels a sense of deep kinship not only to the family remaining in Swan River First Nation, but also to the earth and other-than-human kin, both in Swan River but also in amiskwacîwâskahikan, where she still resides.

Beyond tracing these erasures, and defying them by producing an alternative “felt archive,” I ask what responsibilities I have as a descendent of Helen McRee, living in the city away from my territory, and as an uninvited visitor in someone else’s. Indigenous kinship obligations are rooted in our relationships to particular places, and yet these reciprocal obligations are not bounded – they remain with us even as we move across space. Further, we develop new relations as we move, without supplanting the old. The binary becomes messy; it is

not linear because people's lives are not linear. How can we honour the fact that all land is Indigenous land, despite the fact that the settler state and capital have sought to displace, divide, and disconnect us from our territories and each other in the creation of differential spaces, borders, and colonial ordering logics? How can we rephrase and reframe these questions if we refract them through kinship?

Chapter 4: Ka mâyitôtamihk³¹: Reconfiguring Kinship Practices in Treaty

Eight Territory

“There are no Cree words to describe PCBs...”

—Jim Badger (Cree), qtd. in *Poisoning Paradise*

“think maybe
reserve is
another word
for morgue
is another word
for body bags
—call it home anyways”

—Billy-Ray Belcourt (Cree), “God’s River,” *This Wound is a World*

In Neil McArthur and Warren Cariou’s (Métis) documentary *Land of Oil and Water* (2009), an Indigenous man living nearby Fort McMurray states with urgency that “People are dying.” He continues that the area has become “a warzone,” and that it is “ground-zero” in a fight between economic interests and resource extraction on one side, and the bodies affected by this extraction on the other (i.e., the predominantly Indigenous communities surrounding the area). Ultimately, the resident is intimately concerned with what was at the time the rapidly developing oil sands in Treaty Eight area in Northern Alberta, and he uses the (what could be seen as hyperbolic) analogy of ‘war’ to describe the phenomenon. This tendency to refer to the oil sands as a site of ‘war’ or ‘warfare’ is not limited to this one interaction, however, as media outlets have referred to oil sands production as a battle against/over the environment repeatedly

³¹ Ka mâyitôtamihk in Cree translates roughly to “violence.”

(Cheadle, 2015; Hogberg, 2013; Marsden, 2012; McCarthy, 2009). Indeed, the media often frames the many violences inflicted on Indigenous peoples by settler-colonial states in these terms.

While some may not perceive the more mundane, i.e. non-military, violences visited upon Indigenous communities as ‘war’ strictly speaking, Sora Han’s notion that we must think of the United States (and settler colonial nations more broadly) not “*at war*” but “*as war*” is useful here (qtd. in A. Simpson 153, emphasis in original). If we view the biopolitical management of Indigenous populations and Indigenous territories as rationalities rooted in the organizing frame of settler colonialism, then the states of emergency putatively thought to be produced through war are “structural, not eventful” – that is to say, war is the very condition of settler colonialism and not a by-product of it (A. Simpson 154). Indeed, the largest ever domestic deployment of military forces against Indigenous peoples in North America took place within Canada, in the context of the so-called “Oka crisis.” As Audra Simpson writes, the “highest number of troops in the history of Indigenous-settler relations in North America was deployed to Kanehsatà:ke, as this was the most unambiguous form of exceptional relations, that of *warfare*” (152, emphasis mine). And, as Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz and others have noted, Western imperial powers still refer to “enemy territories” abroad as “Indian Country” and to “wanted terrorists” as “Geronimo” (56). What these theorists point to, among other things, are the ways in which violence is enacted against Indigenous peoples and their homelands, including environmental or ecological and even ontological violence.

Although the preoccupation with resource extraction and development in Treaty Eight territory has focused predominantly on the oil sands, there are numerous other examples of sites that have had catastrophic environmental and ecological impacts in the area. Recent activist

efforts have shone a light on the impending construction of the Site C dam (dubbed the Site C Clean Energy Project), a massive hydroelectric project that will have significant effects not only on wildlife and landscape in the area, but to the people living in Treaty Eight as well, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous (Batycki, 2017; Turner, 2016). Indeed, the project has been deemed as so dangerous that one former CEO for BC Hydro called for the project to be “killed” (Nikiforuk n.p.). Worth noting is not only how imbricated all of these ecological issues are, but how they shroud or obfuscate the multitude of other environmental calamities that have befallen the area, such as the massive wildfires in Lesser Slave Lake in 2011.³² Yet, the direct relationship between environmental destruction and colonial violence are rarely acknowledged within mainstream discussions of even these high-profile moments of ecological catastrophe, let alone acknowledged in relation to the slowly unfolding catastrophes that are necessary for the everyday operations of settler colonial societies like Canada.

Although a subtle change has taken place in the Canadian media landscape whereby resource and commercial development enterprises are being covered in greater detail (though this, too, is still marginal), there exist numerous sites that have always garnered little attention or, if they did, have since receded from view. One example of this fading from view is the Swan Hills Waste Treatment Centre (SHTC), a waste processing plant that was so toxic that it was at one point dubbed as “Canada’s version of Chernobyl” (Sherbaniuk 26), and is located near my community and other Cree communities in the area of Treaty Eight, including Swan River First Nation, Sucker Creek First Nation, and Driftpile Cree Nation. While this chapter will be

³² This is just a sampling of the instances of environmental racism in Canada, as one could include anything from mercury contamination near Grassy Narrows (Willow, 2014; Vecsey 1987), or the constant emitting of toxins in Chemical Valley, near the Ojibwe community of Aamjiwnaang (Scott, 2013). The examples I have referenced above have all occurred, or are occurring, in Treaty Eight territory in Alberta.

preoccupied with outlining the particular ecological and relational violences done in Treaty Eight territory, particularly with regard to the SHTC, and the relative lack of engagement with these violences in Canadian print culture, it also gestures to the broader issues of environmental racism in a prairie and wider Canadian (and, hopefully, global) context.

By consulting literature and criticism on environmental justice and racism, as well as the testimonies of Indigenous communities in Treaty Eight through archival documents such as personal narratives and newspaper clippings, I chart the many ways in which the establishment and continued existence of the Swan Hills Waste Treatment centre has had a profound effect on kinship relationships in the area; by this I am not only suggesting relations between Indigenous peoples, both generationally and on an everyday basis, but also between human and other-than-human-kin and the land more broadly. Furthermore, I look to how the establishment, maintenance, and projected future of the SHTC signals multiple failures to create meaningful alliances and solidarities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, or what I have referred to in earlier chapters, following Cree scholar Karyn Recollet (2017), as possible “kin-in-the-making” (n.p.). This chapter will attempt to deal with the issue of the possibility of kinship relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples sharing similar territories; that is to say, why are (predominantly white) settlers seemingly fine with the slow violence they not only inflict on, but also tacitly allow to happen to, Indigenous populations? And why does slow violence against Indigenous peoples fail to produce an ethical crisis or political mobilization amongst white settlers? After all, while it is true that Indigenous peoples bear the brunt of most environmental pollution in the examples I engage with in this chapter, it nonetheless remains true that non-Indigenous, settler populations live downstream from this very same pollution as well.

CHAPTER METHODOLOGY

This chapter can be thought of as an intervention that attempts to give figurative shape to the pervasive silence around the Swan Hills Waste Treatment Centre (SHTC), a site that has been around for nearly four decades and whose capacity to damage and injure remains potent and ongoing. Specifically, in this chapter I outline how the creation of the SHTC has rendered my community of Swan River First Nation, as well as other communities in the Treaty Eight area, as “sacrifice zones,” through damaging local ecosystems and threatening our ability to engage in hunting, fishing, and other land-based practices.

Steve Lerner outlines “sacrifice zones” as the ways in which the environmental health, safety, and sustainability of low-income, minority, and Indigenous lands and populations are consistently compromised through disproportionate exposure to harmful toxins in the name of protecting more affluent, predominantly white communities. Elaborating on why he employs the term “sacrifice zones,” Lerner posits that “it dramatizes the fact that low-income and minority populations, living adjacent to heavy industry ... are required to make disproportionate health and economic sacrifices that more affluent [white] people can avoid” (3).³³ To Lerner, this “pattern of unequal exposures constitutes a form of environmental racism” (3), and, in short, demonstrates how not all communities are polluted equally (some not at all).

This unequal distribution of exposure to harmful toxins and chemicals also resonates with Rob Nixon’s *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011). To Nixon, slow

³³ While Lerner’s work is generative, the idea of “sacrifice” can sometimes connote ideas of self-sacrifice for valour or honour for an entity like the nation-state. In this sense, then, one could refer to these areas as human (and other-than-human) sacrificial zones instead, since Indigenous communities are not volunteering themselves for these sacrifices. Regardless of the terminology, the result is still the same: the health and wellbeing of Indigenous populations is leveraged for the comfort (both physical and aesthetic) of wealthy white communities.

violence is “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (3). Further, and “[c]rucially, slow violence is often not just attritional but also exponential, operating as a major threat multiplier; it can fuel long-term, proliferating conflicts in situations where the conditions for sustaining life become increasingly and gradually degraded” (4). Indeed, it is this accumulative nature of slow violence, of the myriad harmful forces operating within sacrifice zones over an extended period of time, that masks it as ‘not violence at all.’ The way violence operates in these contexts, then, is that it lacks the immediate properties that are most commonly associated with the term “violence” (e.g., acute, explosive, physical force), and these theorists instead try to describe and show a violence that has multiple harmful effects that are enacted over long periods of time, and whose effects are therefore not always easily traceable to their original source or root cause(s). Providing a response to these not always perceptible violences requires giving a “figurative shape to formless threats whose fatal repercussions are dispersed across space and time” (Nixon 6), and also entails that we recognize the multiple registers of violence, from explosive surges, to the protracted battles that cover vast (or, in this case, hyper-specific) geographies.

In this chapter, although I consult the work of environmental racism and justice scholars like Lerner and Nixon, I foreground the work of Indigenous peoples because I want to acknowledge and consider how Indigenous communities have long been documenting and intervening to make visible, and disrupt, the slow violence against us. Increasingly, Indigenous scholars like Zoe Todd (2016) and Kim TallBear (2016) point out that current concerns about the so-called “Anthropocene” and impending ecological apocalypse tend to elide longer colonial histories that have led to this moment, and have affected and continue to disproportionately

impact colonized and racialized peoples. Further, the Women's Earth Alliance and Native Youth Sexual Health Network's *Violence on the Land, Violence on Our Bodies* emphasizes that particular forms of environmental violence often manifest as "the disproportionate and often devastating impacts that the conscious and deliberate proliferation of environmental toxins and industrial development (including extraction, production, export and release) have on Indigenous women, children and future generations, without regard from States or corporations for their severe and ongoing harm" (14). Inspired by this work, I want to ask how critical Indigenous scholars, activists, and communities offer our own theorizations of environmental racism and critiques of the harms produced toward our communities and our lands since the initiation of colonization. To do so, this chapter will interweave historical and academic texts and theories with the oral and experiential knowledge of members of the Swan River, Sucker Creek, and Driftpile Cree Nations, all communities associated with the Lesser Slave Lake Indian Regional Council and located within the Treaty Eight area.

Using the work of these community members, activists, and theorists (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) as a methodological lens, I want to ask, and potentially answer as well, a series of other questions in this chapter, including: what is settler colonialism if not an ongoing instance of acute and catastrophic violence, but also a primary example of slow violence? How do theories about environmental racism change when we consider 'the environment' to be not just the place we inhabit but part of our web of kinship relations and responsibilities? Is the environment mostly a place or a practice of being and a set of relations? What processes permit, and in some cases, necessitate violence against Indigenous peoples, and how does this relate to violence against other-than-human beings? Is there such a thing as kin-in-the-making, and what does an obligation such as this entail? These questions are why the comments of Indigenous elders will

occupy a significant portion of this chapter, as their words provide some of the clearest examples of the immediate dangers and lasting effects of environmental and ecological degradation. These elders are sources of knowledge making and proliferation too often neglected by environmental officials and colonial authorities. Further, I consider the environment as a practice of being rather than simply a place, and therefore this chapter treats the land as its own source of knowledge production, in addition to the knowledges and discourses provided by scientists as well as by Indigenous communities.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Swan Hills Waste Treatment Centre was built in January of 1987. Following an oil boom in the 1970s, the government of Alberta, then under premier Peter Lougheed, decided to join forces with private corporations to build a waste processing plant. The plant was a merger of public and private interests, involving both the provincial government and the dystopian sounding “Chem-Security Limited, a Canadian subsidiary of a U.S. firm” (Sherbaniuk 29). The purported aim of the treatment centre was not only to take care of the wastes that Alberta's burgeoning oil industry was producing at an alarming rate (to paradoxically “clean up the environment”), but it was also an opportunity to “diversify the economy.” As one *Edmonton Journal* headline crudely put it, there was business in “Making Profit Out of Waste” (Mah n.p.). The line of reasoning was that waste, especially hazardous waste, was going to be produced within the province and it had to be disposed of “somewhere,” and, not only this, but there was also the potential of importing waste from other provinces as well as possibly the U.S to generate profit and accumulate wealth for all parties (both the private companies and the province). Thus, the plant would be responsible for disposing of the wastes created in and around the Treaty Eight

Indigenous nations in Alberta, as well as treating waste from as far away as British Columbia (Cook & Loyie, n.p.) and Quebec (McKeen, n.p.).

When the subsidiary firm Chem-Security limited lost their bid for the waste processing plant after being tied to numerous environmental regulatory violations, as well as to organized crime in Chicago (Sherbaniuk 29), Bow Valley Resource Services Limited, or BVRS, took over and partnered with the province in the endeavour. According to the stipulations of the contract between BVRS and the province, BVRS “was granted a monopoly to treat hazardous wastes in the province, and if the facility's revenue failed to cover the cost of treatment, the Alberta government would make up the difference” (Sherbaniuk 30). BVRS, as a corporate interest group, needed a public or governmental agency to serve as the face of the deal, as communities were not inclined to believe that a waste management conglomerate would have their best interests, or health, in mind; meanwhile the Alberta government needed a “business-wise company” to lead them into the impending diversification of their economy and to attract other, potentially just as environmentally destructive, corporations. Ultimately, BVRS assumed no risk at all as their deficits would be recuperated through governmental subsidies, and because the provincial government would also agree “to assume all liability for cleanup at the Swan Hills site,” including the many waste spills and fugitive emissions that would occur at the facility in subsequent years (Sherbaniuk 30).

THE SCIENCE OF WASTE TREATMENT PLANTS

I want to linger a while on this idea of risk, as no records of discussions of surrounding communities affected by the treatment centre are archived in the documents that I have found—indeed most of the concerns expressed are about the financial burdens placed on the generic

“taxpayer” of Alberta. In fact, it is not until years later that prominent scientists and mainstream newspapers provided information on the concrete dangers posed by the plant, yet rarely framing them as a danger shouldered heavily by Indigenous communities. While very little scholarly/critical work has been written on the SHTC, a few texts that have engaged with the site. For instance, this chapter deals extensively with Allard and Reinhardt’s little-seen documentary “Poisoning Paradise,” and Richard Sherbaniuk’s synopsis of the plant published in *Alberta Views* magazine in 1997. Sherbaniuk provides a detailed description of the legal, political, and financial processes that led to the construction of the hazardous waste treatment centre. Sherbaniuk’s short write-up details the many private waste disposal companies involved, the shifting of private and public resources, and the succession of different provincial actors engaging with the waste treatment plant in Swan Hills. While helpful, Sherbaniuk’s piece predictably focuses on the damages done to ‘the Canadian taxpayer’ above all else, describing in little detail the fervent opposition by Indigenous groups to the project, and the subsequent damage to ecosystems done after the construction of the plant. Indeed, the small amount of writing Sherbaniuk does expend on Indigenous peoples is telling in both what it includes and elides: “during 1996, an airborne leak of PCBs caused Alberta Health to issue an advisory against eating large amount of game taken within a 30-kilometre radius of the plant ...[BVRS] was charged ... with six environmental infractions. Native bands in the area sued” (32). Sherbaniuk concludes the end of his piece on the SHTC with the tepid (at best) assertion that “[t]he story of the Swan Hills Treatment Centre shows there is a certain price to pay for trying to protect the environment” (33), without anything resembling a critique or a reasoning for why Indigenous communities are continually the ones to shoulder this burden.

Accounts such as these “offer a microcosm into the consistent refusal and/or inability to

reduce the environmental racism gap,” which Laura Pulido defines as “the persistent inequality between white and nonwhite communities,” which manifests in “practices, regulations, and outcomes” (525). Pulido clarifies further by way of example with the following anecdote: “in California’s Global Warming Solutions Act ... it was knowingly decided to continue allowing pollution concentrations in vulnerable communities as part of a larger effort to reduce global warming” (526). Pulido, along with Lerner and Nixon referenced in the introduction, emphasizes the ways in which swaths of vulnerable or marginalized populations are exposed to harmful pollutants for ‘the good of all,’ which is mostly an “all” made up of predominately white communities. Indeed, while in many ways it was colonization itself that initiated centuries of environmental destruction, it is only when this destruction starts to clearly affect white, middle class communities that it rises to the level of popular concern. Further, even in efforts to reverse or halt this destruction, there is often a continuation of the colonial calculus by which the wellbeing of devalued populations is sacrificed in the name of a purportedly universal “public good.”

Indeed, the implicit distinction between communities that count and those that don’t was repeatedly articulated around the building of the Swan Hills Waste Treatment Plant, even as the language of necessity tended to mask the political implications. For instance, Premier Peter Lougheed asserted in neutral language that in building the SHTC, “[the Alberta government’s] intent was to serve the people of the province” (qtd. in Sherbaniuk 30). This was, Lougheed claimed, “because there was no way to destroy [the waste] and it was too dangerous to dump” (Sherbaniuk 27), and thus, creating the SHTC was “the cost of cleaning up the environment, which had to be done” (qtd. in Sherbaniuk 30). However, he did not identify which communities would have to pay this “cost,” nor consider how the SHTC was meant to “serve” them. Waste

was then shipped not only from neighbouring hazardous waste producers, like the oil sands, but also from urban centres, such Edmonton and Calgary. In fact, with the creation of the SHTC in Northern Alberta, scientists and faculty members at the University of Alberta lobbied to shut down an incinerator located near the campus, as they could now export their waste and not have to risk being exposed to emissions produced within city limits (Ellis, n.p.). The incinerator located near the campus took “used laboratory chemicals from virtually all post-secondary schools in the province including the University of Calgary, the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology and the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology;” however now the used chemicals would be sent to the Swan Hills area for incineration (Ellis, n.p.). Excluded from the category of the ‘people of the province,’ then, are both those Indigenous communities where these pollutants are produced through resource extraction and other waste-producing processes, as well as the communities surrounding SHTC where pollutants are processed. Although these communities became unwillingly intertwined, their resulting entanglement nonetheless raises the possibility of shared resistance against environmental violence, an issue I will return to later.

Environmental waste regulations were far from adequate at the time of the building of the treatment centre, and they only continued to get worse as time went on and new policies emerged. Bill Ross, “former environmental coordinator with Imperial Oil Ltd. and board member of the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation (ASWMC)” (Sherbaniuk 28), stated that the environmental “regulations turned out to be a nightmare,” and “[a]s a result, the only wastes [Swan Hills was] getting at the beginning was the stuff nobody in their right mind would put into a hole in the ground – liquid PCBs, cyanide” among other things (31). PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls are important to highlight here, as they have had some of the most devastating effects on the communities surrounding the SHTC, particularly the Sucker Creek and

Swan River First Nations.

Describing the inherent dangers of waste disposal at the Swan Hills Waste Treatment Centre, University of Alberta ecology professor David Schindler argued:

You do have to get rid of this stuff. But it's a mistake to move it all to one site, like Swan Hills. Even at an incineration efficiency of 99.9999 per cent, that leaves .0001 per cent that doesn't burn and gets released. Burn hundreds of thousands of tonnes, and those minute amounts add up and you have contaminated wildlife and water bodies. The levels of PCBs, dioxans and furans in deer and moose livers are the highest ... I've ever seen (qtd. in Sherbaniuk 32).

Agreeing with this account, Myles Kitagawa, then associate director of Toxics Watch stated that “[it] doesn't make sense for Alberta to [incinerate waste] and ask natives and northern Albertans to assume the ecological liability for all of Canada. Companies make money using these substances and then escape liability by shipping them off to Swan Hills. They should be destroying them onsite, using currently available technology, such as mobile incinerators. That way, if there are fugitive emissions, they are polluting their own environment, not ours” (Sherbaniuk 32). However, these accounts did not prompt immediate action from the province to stop leaks and emissions. Further, scientists with competing environmental discourses also emerged, ultimately stalling conversations around the efficacy of the plant and its harmful effects and what should be done about it. For instance, Dr. Walter Harris, professor of chemistry at the University of Alberta, states that “[m]odern analytical techniques can show that there is a host of toxic substances at detectable levels in *virtually anything* ... Hundreds of ‘toxic’ substances are present in humans as well as wild and domestic animals [but] the mere fact of detectability has

no necessary relation to the level of health threat” (Harris qtd. in Sherbaniuk 32). Given Harris’ possible investment in having the incinerator near the University of Alberta shut down, the shifting discursive parameters of scientific debates make clear how “[o]fficials at industries accused of causing pollution problem[s] sometimes exploit ... differing views in a divide-and-conquer strategy designed to splinter and outlast local ... environmental justice campaign[s]” (Lerner 10). I provide these accounts to compare and contrast them with the oral accounts given by members of the Sucker Creek and Swan River First Nations, two communities most directly affected by the toxic emissions emanating from the SHTC.

ECOLOGICAL INTIMACIES IN TREATY EIGHT TERRITORY

Describing the effects of the waste treatment plant on the local economies of their nations, Jim Badger and Gerald Giroux provide strikingly similar accounts. Speaking about the changing landscape in the Swan Hills valley, Badger states: “Many people do not go [near Swan Hills] anymore to hunt, many people do not go there anymore to do vision quests, to do gathering of herbs, plants, roots, barks ... people do not go there to fish anymore, because of the dangers that are there” (*Poisoning Paradise*). Relaying an anecdote about shooting a deer near his traplines, Gerald Giroux provides a similar description: “I went and got my boy and we took [the deer] home and I skinned it. I couldn’t see nothing wrong with the meat, but my boy wanted to tan the hide ... I said okay what you have to do is take out the brain to soften the hide. When I cut in there, there was a sight I’ve never seen before in my life. There were worms, some sort of worms in the [deer’s] brain” (*Poisoning Paradise*). Giroux continues, “I’ve taken hundreds and hundreds of brains out of animal[s], and I’ve never seen that before. It appeared to me ... I’m not a doctor, but it appeared to me as some form of cancer” (Gerald Giroux qtd. in *Poisoning*

Paradise). Giroux's pointing to his not being 'a doctor' is precisely what is at stake in these matters – seen as lacking a scientific expertise or rigor, he would likely be dismissed by so-called western 'experts,' and yet it is this exact knowledge that is valuable in evaluating the effects of contaminants on Indigenous peoples and their homelands. As Sarah Hunt (2014) writes, "Indigenous knowledge is rarely seen as legitimate on its own terms, but must be negotiated in relation to pre-established modes of inquiry" (3). Similarly, Cree scholar Cash Ahenekeew (2011) notes how scientific knowledge historically and in the present has "constructed [Indigenous peoples] as primitive, superstitious, and incapable of complex thought" (14). Gerald Giroux, simply put, knows his kin, and when they are stricken with illness, he has a general idea as to where this illness came from through not only his experiential knowledge of engaging with his environment on an everyday basis, but his generational knowledge of being rooted in space and place with his relations.

Indeed, it is this knowing that has incited "[r]epresentatives of ... Treaty 8 bands" to continually oppose and challenge expansions to the waste treatment centre, as these expansions "hurt hunting and gathering in an area Cree people from the south shore of Lesser Slave Lake have used for centuries" (Ellis n.p.). And it is precisely this intergenerational knowledge, and the relational teachings embedded therein, that are affected when the land and the waterways are poisoned in the Swan Hills Valley; that is to say, these violent, toxic processes influence his kinship relations with his son, and prevent an intergenerational knowledge transfer. Leanne Simpson, in a different context, expands on these intergenerational knowledge transfers, writing that they "start out as individual everyday acts of resurgence," but then these practices "grow as they connect with hunters, expert hide tanners, tool makers, story, and Ancestors ... as they embody and generate theory" (*As We Have Always Done*, 194). At risk, then, is the loss of

Indigenous theory and knowledge production, and different political and economic orders that dictate a different present, and portend alternate futures.

These stories by Giroux and Badger are echoed by accounts and headlines such as “Fish near Swan Hills high in mercury” in the Calgary Herald (Masterman, n.p.), and a headline that cuts to the quick by stating, “Animals near [Swan Hills] plant are ‘toxic wastes’” (Lamb, n.p.). Here, even the animals themselves are walking distributors of toxicity. And while a headline calling animals toxic wastes borders on the sensational, and relegates our other-than-human relations to a conceptual category of depletion and denigration, it is not, in fact, that far from the truth. Myles Kitagawa outlines how one of “the worst sort of chemical pollutions to be released into the environment are ... bio-accumulative properties” (*Poisoning Paradise*). Bio-accumulative chemicals are “substances [that] collect in the tissues of living organisms, and they also collect as [one] move[s] up trophic levels in the food chain” (Kitagawa qtd. in *Poisoning Paradise*). For example, if there is an “insect with a low level of the pollutant in its system, [and] ... a bird ... feeds on that insect,” then there is a “much greater volume of [the chemical] substance in [the bird’s] tissues” (Kitagawa qtd. in *Poisoning Paradise*). In short, these harmful chemical properties accumulate, as “homes and bodies are invaded by highly toxic releases from nearby facilities” (Lerner 1). Here, it is easy to see how PCBs collect in the tissues of all life forms and peoples around the Swan Hills Treatment Centre and, in turn, render these life forms or peoples into portrayals of abstract toxic entities. Toxic entities have prevented elders like Harvey Giroux of the Driftpile Cree Nation from collecting “[s]weetgrass and tree fungus for traditional ceremonies, rat root for soothing pain, and the barks of various trees for medicinal purposes,” items which “were once gathered in the high forests surrounding Swan Hills” (Ellis n.p.). The same can be said for Sucker Creek Elder Russel Willier, who states matter-of-factly

the processes of hunting and its impending expectations: “We make offerings and pray before we hunt ... and we give offerings when we kill the animal, which most people don’t do” (qtd. in Allard and Reinhardt). This disruption and destruction of Indigenous lifeworlds, modes of existence, and relations between humans and other-than human beings, points to the incommensurable difference in ethical imperatives between the scientists, politicians, and technicians operating and advocating on behalf of the waste treatment centre, and the Indigenous communities interacting with the plant’s effects on a daily basis (not to mention the pain and suffering these other-than-human beings experience as a result of being so deeply poisoned).

In fact, it is what proponents of the SHTC *do not do* that has incited Kitagawa to call for the establishment of an elders’ council to study, discuss, and ultimately recommend responses to the waste treatment centre. Hunting, trapping, fishing, and medicine-gathering for Indigenous communities in Northern Alberta are not only a vital source of food and income, but as Russell Willier has pointed out, these activities are grounded in “cultural and spiritual life” (Allard and Reinhardt). While he and other elders continually work to save these central parts of their natural economy, they have been losing ground rapidly to industrial development and resource extraction that actively harm them and their kin – both human and other-than-human. It is this destruction of Indigenous economies and kinship systems that has prompted Métis scholar Zoe Todd to ask: “What does it mean ... to dwell in an active and philosophical way in the realities of the ‘modernist mess’ and ‘toxic vitalism’ which provinces like Alberta ... have been saddled with through extractive settler-colonial political economies?” (106). Todd points to the ways in which our kin are weaponized against one another, becoming the so-called “toxic entities” they are labelled as in sensationalist headlines, but also how we allow and are in some ways complicit in this weaponization –becoming, in a sense, weapons ourselves. For example, Todd speaks to

the way kin are deployed against one another when speaking about a Husky Oil spill along the North Saskatchewan River. The bitumen used to produce oil and involved in the oil spill is a product of fossils, who Todd deems as our kin,³⁴ being converted into fossil fuels that then pollute the land and the peoples and other-than-human beings on this land. In this way, not only do our kin, in the form of fossil fuel by-products and pollution, harm us, but we ultimately harm them not only in this production, but also in the turning of them into ‘makeshift’ weapons through our creation of deadly pollutants that inflict damage on all life forms in proximity to the geographies of its production (and, just as crucially, the world more generally). She stresses that “we must contend with the paradoxes of weaponization,” with how those with whom we share an intimate ecology also threaten to do us harm (106). For Todd, it is not the fault of ‘toxic beings’ for their violent effects, but rather the colonial, capitalist machinations that would frame our kin in such a way and produce this toxicity within them – just as kinship relations are themselves webbed, the impacts are as well.³⁵ Indeed, it is a whole chain of weaponization, starting with the hazardous wastes that collect at the lands surrounding (and underneath) the SHTC, with some of the wastes being the fossil/kin containing bitumen about which Todd and others like Warren Cariou and Jon Gordon write (2016); beyond this, it is through the bio-accumulative pollutants, such as PCBs, that collect in the tissues of the insects, mammals and fish in the area, which then enter the diet of the individuals in the surroundings communities, collecting in their tissues as

³⁴ To quote Todd at length here: “the bones of dinosaurs and the traces of flora and fauna from millions of years ago which surface in rocks and loamy earth in Alberta act as teachers for us, reminding us of the life that once teemed here when the place that we know as Alberta was home to myriad species who made life, made worlds, within lands and waters I now know as pehonan. But, the insatiable desire to liberate these long-gone beings from their resting place, to turn the massive stores of carbon and hydrogen left from eons of life in this place, weaponises these fossil-kin” (104).

³⁵ Adrian Louis, in “Evil Corn,” provides a similar example of this weaponization of kin when he contrasts the kinship relationship so many communities have with Corn/Maize with the industrializing poison of genetically modified corn, which ultimately turns a relative into an enemy on a cellular level.

well; and finally, it is how these diets, and the kin that make them up, affect the broader families and nations located around Swan Hills, destroying Indigenous ways of life and modes of production.

Speaking in the context of these losses, Elder Russell Willier describes how in the prevailing logic of acquiring and producing food for the community, one would “cu[t] up the meat so we could share with the people here, the ones that are misfortunate and disabled, and some that are just poor hunters ... everyone gets an animal, you know” (Allard and Reinhardt). This act creates and sustains what Leanne Simpson refers to as a “nationhood based on a series of radiating responsibilities” (*As We Have Always Done*, 8). Willier continues to explain that because of the increasing risk of contamination in the animal, fish, and plant life in the area (and the resultant adverse health effects to humans), not only has this economy of sharing begun to recede, but also the practice of hunting has almost stopped in traditional hunting grounds altogether. Increasingly, expensive travel (requiring fuel, equipment, and access to appropriate vehicles) has become a necessity if one wishes to hunt or gather medicine, which very few members of the community can afford. The result of such processes is the radical altering of ways of life and being, or what Glen Coulthard refers to as “Indigenous modes of life” (4). Coulthard describes this altering as “Canada’s repeated attempts to overtly uproot and destroy the vitality and autonomy of Indigenous modes of life through ... explicitly undercutting Indigenous political economies and relations to and with land” (4). Here then, we see slow violence gradually enacted against an Indigenous lifeworld, against Indigenous modes of production that settler colonialism continually and constantly attempts to eliminate. Thus, while these relations between kin, which are material, political, spiritual, beautiful, and offer strength, they also make Indigenous peoples vulnerable – when one is so connected, to harm one part of

the web affects all the other parts. Of course, it is colonial violence that is the source of this vulnerability, and for this reason Todd calls for an ongoing “urgency in our collective work” that “tend[s] to ongoing reciprocal relationships between humans and more-than-humans in the prairies,” including the land itself, in the face of settler colonialism (106). The tar sands, then, are implicated in other forms of pollution that are not given the same sort of exposure or attention, such as the waste collected, treated, and ultimately spilled at sites like Swan Hills. If people are concerned about the hazardous environmental effects of a place like the tar sands in Alberta, then they also should be cognizant of the other no less disastrous environmental impacts of resource development projects in the area, which were created to tend to the by-products of resource extraction enterprises. Resource development and extraction processes, entities, and programs such as these are interspersed throughout the prairies.

And ultimately non-Indigenous peoples, potentially, are also enmeshed in these relations, even though they continually violate them, and try to insulate themselves from the harms they enact, and even though they are also likely to be killed by these same processes in the long term. Although white settler populations are also affected by pollution (waste flows downhill, after all), they cannot or refuse to see it this way, and are willing to sacrifice Indigenous peoples or their potential “kin-in-the-making.” Missing from these interactions is what Leanne Simpson refers to as an “ecology of intimacy,” wherein what is emphasized is an “ecology of relationships in the absence of coercion, hierarchy, or authoritarian power” (*As We Have Always Done*, 8). Indeed, Simpson foregrounds this ecology in Indigenous communities and their notions of kinship, as she describes this intimacy as “a web of connections to each other, to the plant nations, the animal nations, the rivers and lakes, the cosmos, and our neighboring Indigenous nations” (8). The problem, therefore, appears to be that, on the whole, white people do not view

Indigenous peoples nor other-than-human beings as kin and are unable or unwilling to claim them as such, forgoing cultivating these relationships, despite an already existing treaty relationship in the context of Treaty Eight territory. Ultimately, these ecologies of intimacy are rooted in “relationships based on deep reciprocity, respect, noninterference, self-determination, and freedom” (8), and in their absence, we see not only an abrogation of existing treaty relations, but also a failure to promote a kin(ship)-in-the-making.

ALLIANCES AND MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

When asked about the SHTC shortly after a toxic emission, then-mayor of Swan Hills, and former fish and wildlife officer Gary Pollack, proclaimed: “BVRS is an excellent corporate citizen ... I am confident they can do their business, do it safely, do it well, and make a profit. People talk about the costs of the facility, but because of it, we’ve got a clean environment here” (Sherbaniuk 31-2). Given that this statement was provided shortly after a massive release of PCBs and other chemical by-products into the air and lands of Treaty Eight, the cognitive dissonance displayed by Pollack here is striking, but not surprising. The town of Swan Hills jockeyed for the site where the treatment centre would eventually be built, ultimately achieving their wish, and in the process cementing what they viewed as potential opportunities for employment of their citizens – all at the expense of their neighbouring communities in the Treaty Eight area. Swan Hills, it is worth noting, sits almost right in the centre of Treaty Eight and, like its namesake, resides on a hill. The waste, and the by-products from this waste, unsurprisingly tumble, seep, and spill to the surrounding communities below. Speaking to this, Jim Badger asks plainly: “What has occurred here is that we have been marginalized, we’re not involved in the decision-making or planning systems, we’re not being involved in areas that impact us or could

impact us directly ... If something occurs – they put it on top the hill. Who’s the idiot that said let’s put it on top of the hill? You know, god, this kind of thinking – Indians don't think like that” (qtd. in Allard and Reinhardt).

Further, the town of Swan Hills is located 300 kilometers north of Edmonton, Alberta, one of the major contributors of hazardous wastestreams to the treatment centre. Before the provincial government decided on Swan Hills as the area in which to build the treatment plant, they considered the town of Ryley, a community 80 kilometers south from Edmonton and thus closer to the high levels of waste needing disposal. Here, I am not suggesting that Ryley take on the burden of having to incinerate the wastes of different townships, municipalities, and provinces, but there have been subsequent proposals in succeeding years to build smaller waste treatment centres to offload some of the work and risk being shouldered by Swan Hills and Treaty Eight more broadly. The response to these proposals, predictably, has not been great. Protests from the Ryley area have seen residents holding placards that say “No Need for Another Facility. Swan Hills wants and needs ALL biomedical waste” (Edwards, n.p.). In case this portrayal of Ryley residents appears unfair, Brian Staszewski, former director of Edmonton’s Environmental Resource Centre, in an interview about the opening of a treatment centre in Ryley, stated “It’s a real concern that there is a possibility of Alberta taking other provinces’ wastes ... Isn’t this supposed to be done at Swan Hills?” (Edwards n.p.).

Indeed, these types of claims, that Swan Hills needs or wants these wastes, has a long history, as a *Wall Street Journal* article ran the headline “Small Town in Alberta Embraces What Most Reject: Toxic Waste” in 1991 (Tomsho 1). These quotes and headlines demonstrate how the areas in Treaty Eight are simultaneously treated as being of, and of use to, but ultimately apart from, the rest of the province. Stasenki's opposition to the building of a treatment centre in

Ryley, despite being in Edmonton, illustrates that the town of Ryley is simply not far enough out of sight or mind for the Edmonton Environmental Resource Centre. To put it simply, these wastes *do* need to be disposed of, but not in a way that is viewable by Edmonton, Calgary, or other valued and valuable provincial landscapes. But this violent opposition to the potential of creating and upholding healthy meaningful relations, during a time when Canadian officials spout platitudes about “reconciliation,” is not unique to Ryley or Edmonton, as towns and cities from Kamloops (Cook & Loyie, n.p.) to Montreal (McKeen, n.p.) have also resisted waste treatment centres and have suggested Swan Hills as an alternative, all this in spite of the great distances this waste would have to travel to get there. Ultimately, from the responses of community members in Ryley, Edmonton, and cities in other provinces, it appears as though not all pollution is distributed equally, and many would prefer to have it remain that way.

Even more unthinkable for most is the idea(l) that we might have a world wherein toxic wastes are not produced in the first place, in which we organize our existence such that the only wastes we produce are those that can be composted within the wider metabolism of respectful human and other-than-human relations. In the long term, it is no doubt necessary to think about a future without resource extraction and development projects, such as our overreliance on crude oil; even if most of us cannot currently imagine such a future, we can remember a past where we did not have this, because it was not always this way. At the same time, as we engage in these projects of building other worlds, we also need to consider how we might address the immediate effects of existing colonial wastes, and address poisoned landscapes in ways that do not continue to rely on northern, prairie communities to bear the brunt of this burden.

Of course, it is also necessary to address the consideration that no matter where this waste goes, it will be deposited and “treated” in Indigenous lands, just as it was also produced on these

same Indigenous lands. Here then, we have to account for the fact that *specific* reserve lands are treated as acute sacrifice zones, whereas predominantly white communities are not – while also attending to the idea that, at the same time, resource extraction industries as a whole treat all of Canada that way. For this precise reason – that is, the machinations of capitalism and colonialism – is why an attempt to focus on kinship-in-the-making might be a worthwhile endeavor for non-Indigenous communities, for not only would it adhere to the principles of the multiple treaties and treaty lands involved in the production and treatment of these wastes (both in Treaty Eight and Treaty Six), but it could ultimately benefit white settlers as well, as the harmful effects of these wastes will reach them eventually. Settlers deny their relationships and responsibilities not only to Indigenous peoples, but to other than-human-beings as well. Colonial modes of existence presume a distinct separation between “man” and “nature,” and thus assume that man can exploit and pollute nature without it ever affecting him. This denial of relationality has been somewhat feasible up until now, as settlers have largely externalized the true costs of maintaining their industrial existence, and thereby, have immunized themselves from the toxicity they have created – that is why wastes are exported, and why pipelines are diverted away from white spaces. At the end of the day, however, colonialism’s toxic tailings know no borders, and even the settler’s groundwater is not immune. It is perhaps only now that climate change has become increasingly harder to deny that settlers are starting to take note of their deep dependence on and interrelation with the environment, even as many still fail to see themselves as the cause of the destruction that now threatens their own backyard. If indeed “empire ... is on the verge of apocalyptic environmental collapse” (Byrd 3), then it is likely that the only thing that could enable the settler’s survival is to make kin and honor the relationships that he has thus far disavowed.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have sought to give my initial findings about the past and present of the Swan Hills Treatment Centre. Since the initial and ongoing displacements of Indigenous peoples through colonization, communities in the Treaty Eight area and across Canada more broadly, have often been relegated to, or turned into, ‘sacrifice zones.’ These sacrificial areas are especially salient in the area of Treaty Eight, as numerous communities have had to witness environmentally destructive projects be built in or near their ancestral territories, from the SHTC, to the proposed Site-C dam, and of course, the oil sands. The examples of environmental degradation in Treaty Eight territories, it seems, are endless. I view the responses from communities openly declaring the inevitable and unpreventable toxicity of the Swan Hills area not only as a form of reactive NIMBY-ism, but also as an ongoing breach of treaty relations and a disavowal of the possibility of establishing and nurturing kin-in-the-making. At a time when ideas of reconciliation are talked about in broad, abstract terms, the shutting down of the SHTC exists as an area in which something resembling “reconciliation,” or at least the establishment of somewhat meaningful relations, can be enacted and cultivated, and yet in all likelihood will not be. In other words, if settler officials are “serious” about these reconciliatory efforts (as they so often declare), then one very material, immediate way of enacting a positive change in relations with Indigenous communities might be how to address the distribution of existing colonial waste, while also looking towards futures wherein we cease to produce such waste in the first place.

Of course, these preoccupations with “reconciliation” and the supposed intention of having good relations with Indigenous nations usually serve only as lip service, and are often ignored precisely when resource extraction/development becomes involved (and the possible poisoning

of Indigenous communities is reproduced again and again).³⁶ For example, one need only look to the current Trudeau government's purchasing of the Kinder Morgan pipeline and their dogged insistence on its construction, against the wishes of some (though not all) Indigenous nations (Barrera, 2018; Trichur, 2018). The simple fact of the matter is that Indigenous peoples cannot "reconcile" with a State entity that is poisoning them and their kin, and to suggest otherwise is to be willfully ignorant of not only history, but of the present context of Indigenous-Settler relations. The SHTC still intermittently posts ads for positions at the facility, ensuring its operational status for the foreseeable future. In the area of Treaty Eight, wherein environmental degradation masquerades as inevitable, the Swan Hills valley is perceived as a place where wastes can be disposed of, and where communities are viewed as disposable. If we are looking to have "kin-in-the-making," then the shutting down of the Swan Hills Treatment Centre is as good a place as any to begin building these relationships.

What this requires, however, is an ability to see the complexity of Indigenous communities, and acknowledging that these community members have material and bodily autonomies that are both *lived* and *living*. In *Transit of Empire*, Jodi Byrd, paraphrasing Judith Butler, calls on "people to acknowledge, to see, and to grapple with lived lives" (70). Byrd writes about this grappling with lived lives in a context wherein "certain geographies bear the catastrophes of nations addicted to oil," both in the 'global South' but also the many Indigenous communities subjected to environmental degradation in their own oil-abundant territories (xv). In so doing, she insists on the need to "apprehend ... the policies creating unlivable, ungrievable conditions

³⁶ For a sustained engagement with how discourses of reconciliation overshadow or obscure the resource extraction/development agendas of settler nation-states, see Dian Million's (2013) *Therapeutic Nations* and Glen Coulthard's (2014) *Red Skin, White Masks*.

within the state-sponsored economies of slow death and letting die” (70). In gesturing to slow death, Byrd is drawing on the work of Lauren Berlant and her explanation of slow death as “the physical wearing out of a population” (95).³⁷ Billy-Ray Belcourt, also employing Berlant’s work, describes slow death as “scenes of *living through* in which mere existence is itself tiring, the product of forms of sovereignty that work on the body of a people day in and day out” (“Meditations on Reserve Life,” 12, italics mine). Berlant writes, “Slow death prospers not in traumatic events, as discrete time-framed phenomena like military encounters and genocides can appear to do, but in temporally labile environments whose qualities and whose contours in time and space are often identified with the presentness of ordinariness itself” (100). The colonial policies that allow projects like the SHTC have a long history, since “[d]espite the original intent of treaty, Canada’s abuse of Cree values of ‘respect, kindness, honesty, and sharing’ has caused the repeated violation of the treaty relationship, which has led to the degradation of lands by harmful industrial practices and disempowerment and dispossession ... by the government, individual settlers, and corporations” (Venne qtd. in Gaudry 202). And yet this long history has become, in a sense, ordinary, it is “that domain of *living on* in which everyday activity; memory, needs, and desires; and diverse temporalities and horizons of the taken-for-granted are brought into proximity and *lived through*” (Berlant 100, italics mine). That is to say, the ecological degradation of areas in Treaty Eight in particular, but in Indigenous communities and territories more generally, is reified so much that it becomes “ordinary,” and is simply a product of the (“unchangeable”) environment and thus something to be “lived through.” The process of making

³⁷ Byrd also raises the question(s) of where Indigeneity fits in the analyses of Butler and Berlant, asking if Indigenous peoples are “part of the present tense?” – since in their omission from Butler and Berlant’s work, it certainly seems as though they are not (37).

sense of these environments, of apprehending the myriad ways Indigenous life and lifeworlds are afflicted by resource development/extraction, is paramount in interrupting the ongoing ecological violences occurring in Indigenous territories.

For writers like Byrd, Nixon, Berlant, and Belcourt, critical and creative writing play a crucial part in identifying previously obscured forms of destruction, and their imploring others to grapple with these issues can be viewed as advocating for an interruption of the status quo settler regimes of what is and what is not “sensible” – what is tangibly achievable in opposing these precipitous and prolonged acts of violence. But if an act of violence is “customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility” (Nixon 6), then how do we encourage others to apprehend the slow death of environmental destruction in Treaty Eight territory? In response to a question such as this, Nixon argues that it “require[s] creative ways of drawing public attention to catastrophic acts that are low in instant spectacle but high in long-term effects” (6). Indeed, Nixon argues that “to intervene representationally” in these ecological catastrophes, which is to say make their effects visible and urgency decipherable, “entails devising ... symbols that embody amorphous calamities as well as narrative forms that infuse those symbols with dramatic urgency” (6). For Nixon and other scholars of environmental justice and racism, the issue is not simply making people aware of the environmental calamities that are right around the corner. Rather, he is concerned with how we might possibly encourage the communities that are not only normally at a distance from these environmental violences, but which are often in many cases *dependent on* these violences, to act collectively in ways that could interrupt the conditions of existence that are premised on pollution, and consider other, less violent modes of living.

However, if a place has already been hailed as “Canada’s version of Chernobyl”

(Sherbaniuk 26), then the question becomes: just what does it take for white settlers to view the violence afflicting Indigenous communities as an urgent issue or an emergency? How is it possible to make visible the attritional and incremental dangers of the SHTC in a way that will encourage others to notice and take action? Or is ‘taking action’ a possibility or even a desire for (predominantly white) non-Indigenous peoples when confronted with the issues facing Indigenous communities, issues in which these settler communities are complicit? Put more succinctly, how do we keep account of a seemingly invisible violence that actively harms a population largely thought to be disposable by white settler Canadians? If, for Nixon, artists, activists, and academics must “engage the representational, narrative, and strategic challenges posed by the relative invisibility of slow violence,” then what happens when these representations or narratives fail (6) to have the desired transformative effect?

We can view the actions taken by Indigenous elders in the Treaty Eight area, whether through speaking to newspapers or documentary filmmakers, as an attempt to “turn the long emergencies of slow violence into stories dramatic enough to rouse public sentiment and warrant political intervention” (Nixon, 3), even though this intervention is continually deferred and rarely, if ever, comes to fruition. In short, our ‘kin-in-the-making’ fail to “take action.” Thus, the work being done by Indigenous elders and communities in Treaty Eight territory is vital in the context of a colonial society that is designed to perpetually foreclose on Indigenous futures and erase Indigenous existence, at times both immediately harmful and gradually violent. These elders advocate for the creation and nurturing of complex Indigenous lifeworlds and socialities, in the face of structures of slow violence and settler colonialism, and hope to someday not have to (re)build these ways of life within lands that have been, and continue to be, poisoned.

Chapter 5: Namoya Nâpew: Embodied Kinship (Non-)Relations in Billy-Ray

Belcourt's *This Wound is a World*

“This is just the scratched raw surface of my anger / which is fueled by the
righteousness / of knowing we don't have to live this way”

—Chrystos (Menominee), “They're Always Telling Me I'm Too Angry”

“when i tell my mother i need kin / she sends me ten.”

—Joshua Whitehead (Oji-Cree), *Full-Metal Indigiqueer*

Speaking to Shelagh Rogers for CBC's 2016 Canada Reads,³⁸ Tracey Lindberg contextualized her novel *Birdie*, and the issues afflicting its eponymous protagonist, by stating that “many of our family members have those random ‘uncles,’ who are allowed to come and go as they please. But they have no reciprocal obligation to the people of the house, so they don't have to be kind, and they don't have to take care of or be responsible for people's safety.” Expressing her hopes for what reaction(s) *Birdie* might engender in its audience, Lindberg declared: “Sometimes I just want people to recognize that we are relatives. Sometimes I just want them to look at [the protagonist] Bernice and say, ‘Aaah. That is a cousin. That is somebody that I have responsibility for.’” Lindberg, more generally, is interested in the work of aunties and cousins, as this work produces a world wherein characters like Bernice, and their

³⁸ Canada Reads is an annual competition held by the CBC to decide what the best book (usually, but not always, fiction) published in Canada is for that year. Unsurprisingly, the only Indigenous (or, in the case of Boyden, masquerading as Indigenous) writers to win the award have been men, Thomas King and Joseph Boyden, with Boyden's dubious ties to Indigeneity being debated concurrently with the competition and well afterwards: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books-and-media/joseph-boyden/article35881215/>

real-life manifestations, can feel safe – it produces a web of relations that holds Bernice up when she is down. At the same time, Lindberg is also interested in highlighting the catastrophic effects of being a bad/toxic uncle, how intimate forms of violence occur in quotidian spaces like the family home or the reserve community. This toxicity, that is to say the toxicity of ‘bad uncles,’ has much to do with hypermasculine notions of what it means to be an ‘Indigenous man’ in a contemporary North American context, and the worlds that must be sustained in order to maintain these notions of manhood/masculinity on the one hand, and the other, potential liberatory worlds that must be stamped out on the other.³⁹ In short, Lindberg is interested in how the idea of Indigenous masculinity and its various manifestations and incantations can harm, prohibit, or rupture wider, communal kinship relations.

A representative example of this phenomenon occurred this past semester when I was teaching my first senior-level course in Native studies. I taught a course titled “Contemporary Indigenous Scholarship,” and I structured the syllabus of the course to begin with notions of Indigenous feminism(s), then proceeded to teach units on queer Indigenous studies and Two-Spirit studies, deciding to conclude the course by devoting my last week of classes to “Indigenous Masculinities.” I thought that one week would be enough to address the major themes, arguments, and ideas in the field of Indigenous masculinity studies, as well as might help me avoid prolonged conversations over damaged-masculinities and how an inordinate amount of time should be apportioned to fixing or recuperating these masculinities. For the readings that week, I paired an interview with Taiaiake Alfred from the collection *Masculindians* (entitled

³⁹ In a recent poem entitled, “The Terrible Beauty of the Reserve,” Billy-Ray Belcourt (2018) has also detailed the enforced silencing undertaken by uncles in some reserve contexts: “Everyone’s uncle thinks that they are the world’s / most handsome NDN, and no one says otherwise” (n.p.).

“Reimagining Warriorhood: A Conversation with Taiaiake Alfred”) with Billy-Ray Belcourt’s provocative blogpost “Can the Other of Native Studies Speak?” My intention was to provide a representative example of Indigenous masculinities with Alfred’s interview (and the ideas it espouses) and to challenge, contest, or put this in conversation with Belcourt’s meditative critiques of the discipline. Following this, we would finish our Indigenous Masculinities unit, and indeed finish our course, by reading and engaging with Sherman Alexie’s short story “The Toughest Indian in the World” on our last class of the semester.

In a frustrating but simultaneously not at all surprising way, Indigenous masculinities began to seep and infiltrate into the other units I had scheduled as news of Sherman Alexie’s interpersonal violences began to receive greater attention both in Indigenous contexts and the ‘mainstream’ media (Neary n.p.). I had scheduled the readings before news of Alexie’s acts had become public, so I had anticipated that the short story would serve as an interesting example wherein an instance of queer Indigeneity (depicted, admittedly, by a non-queer Indigenous writer) brushed up against hypermasculine forms of Indigenous manhood in a somewhat interesting or generative way. To illustrate how this could have been so, here is a brief summary of the text: an unnamed Indigenous journalist protagonist is tasked with going to a small town outside of Spokane to report on a story about twin firefighters. On his way to this small town, the protagonist muses about his family’s long history of picking up Indigenous hitchhikers, and wanting to continue this lineage, he picks up an Indigenous Fighter that he encounters on the side of the highway. As the two men talk about their lives, and the Fighter provides stories of his brawling exploits, the two men decide to share a hotel room for the night. During their stay, the two men engage in a sexual act, after which time the unnamed protagonist asserts that the Fighter should leave. The Indigenous journalist then shadowboxes in the bathroom after the Fighter

leaves the hotel room, feeling now connected to a past of Indigenous warriors and to ideas of Indigeneity more broadly.

Alexie's "The Toughest Indian in the World" engages with masculinity in several unexpected ways. The unnamed journalist protagonist of the story is puzzling in that he identifies as Spokane, though he appears to romanticize this aspect of himself as if he does not quite *feel like* or embody what it means to be a "Spokane Indian" in his daily life (21). His excitable state around the Fighter – a Lummi boxer – is evidence of this disconnect: "I felt as Indian as Indian gets, driving down the road in a fast car, chewing on jerky, talking to an Indigenous fighter" (27).⁴⁰ Paradoxically, after hearing a story about how the Fighter showed mercy to another fighter who refused to go down, the journalist enthusiastically continues, "You would've been a warrior in the old days, enit? You would've been a killer. You would've stolen everybody's goddamn horses. That would've been you. You would've been it" (30). The journalist's fascination with and desire to appropriate what he imagines is the Fighter's hypermasculinity ultimately results in the complex sexual encounter. In prefacing their sex with "I'm not gay" (32), the journalist invokes for the readers the complex relationship between hypermasculinity and homoeroticism. Given that the journalist sequesters himself away in the bathroom after their sexual encounter and suggests that the Fighter leave, it becomes clear that the journalist believes that he has somehow acquired the hypermasculine, "warrior" essence of the Fighter without also acquiring the non-normative, queer subjectivity that his method of doing so entails: "feeling uncomfortable and cold, I went back into the bathroom [...] I stared at myself in the mirror. Steam quickly filled the room. I threw a few shadow punches [...] I wondered if I was a warrior

⁴⁰ Notice, as well, the tethering of "Indian" to masculinity here, as the protagonist feels as "Indian as Indian gets" when he encounters what he sees to be the embodiment of hyperviolent, Indigenous masculinity.

in this life and if I had been a warrior in a previous life” (33). The journalist, through this queer exchange, exhibits what might be considered “a healthy masculinity” in that he has now become a “warrior.” By highlighting the interconnected nature of hypermasculinity, homophobia, and homoeroticism, Alexie potentially disrupts the notion of “masculinity,” at least as it exists in the minds of dominant, heteronormative society. Contextualized by his personal transgressions, however, the short story rings hollow in its efforts to disturb notions of (hyper)masculinity and, by extension, gender roles and the gender binary.

Although some make the case for separating the author from her/his work, a reading of “the Toughest Indian in the World” that is contextualized by Alexie’s own sexual misconduct is/was (at least in my classroom) unavoidable. To be clear, I am not suggesting that Alexie’s story is in any way biographical. Rather, what I am advocating for is a reading that bears in mind the fact that his work is not conceived in a vacuum; it was written by a man who felt he had the right and the power to control the careers and sex lives of numerous women (Neary, n.p.). In class, we ultimately arrived at the question: what does it mean that these men (Alfred, mentioned earlier, and Alexie) are so formative in the disciplines of not only Indigenous masculinity studies, but also of Indigenous studies more generally in Canada, North America, and the world over?⁴¹

⁴¹ At the time of writing this chapter, the Indigenous Governance program at the University of Victoria released a massive internal report that deals, in part, with the interpersonal transgressions of its faculty members (Barrera): <http://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/university-victoria-indigenous-governance-program-suspended-1.4633889?cmp=rss>. I defer to Billy-Ray Belcourt’s description of how to engage with events such as these: “I don’t have the statistics to substantiate these claims, but there is an archive of heartbreak and loss that is easy to come by if you ask the right people. Indeed, what would such statistics tell us that we don’t already know? What would the biopolitical work of data collection do to a knowledge-making project that thinks outside the big worlds of Statistics and Demography and, instead, inside the smaller, more precarious worlds created in the wake of gossip?” (“Poltergeist,” 25).

Alexie's only depiction of the journalist's heteronormative relationship with Cindy, a white co-worker in the short story, is relevant here. The quality of her presence, both monotonous and mind-numbing to the protagonist, also offsets a striking (and telling) absence of Indigenous women in a story that explores fetishism, objectification, hypermasculinity, queerness, and of course, Indigeneity. This engagement (or lack thereof) with Indigenous women, as well as the transactional nature of the queer exchange with the Indigenous fighter, gesture to the limited space available for the flourishing of queer Indigeneities and Indigenous women in these 'creative,' imaginary worlds. The result is that the potentially subversive troubling of Indigenous (hyper)masculinity that Alexie offers is now eclipsed by his own history of sexual abuse and oppression of Indigenous women, as well as the depleted depictions of Indigenous women that routinely appear in his work.⁴²

The transactional nature of the queer exchange with the Indigenous Fighter also should not be glossed over, as this is how queer Cree poet and scholar Billy-Ray Belcourt has described Indigenous studies' engagement (and, by extension, Indigenous masculinity's engagements more broadly) with queer Indigeneity. Belcourt writes: "[Queer Indigenous peoples] are not interpellated into Native Studies' Native, but, instead, into the token minoritarian interlocutors tasked with complaining about things ... complaints that are too often met with cold shoulders, but ones that will nonetheless be used to evidence Native Studies' interdisciplinarity. And, how does this turn to interdisciplinarity obfuscate Native Studies' hetero- and cisnormative foundations, as if it has simply moved on or become better?" ("Can the Other," n.p.). Speaking

⁴² For a different reading of Sherman Alexie's short story, though one that took place well before the allegations against Alexie were made public, see Lisa Tatonetti's "Sex and Salmon: Queer Identities in Sherman Alexie's *The Toughest Indian in the World*."

to this strategic inclusion or instrumentalization of queer Indigeneity (which is in many ways a unidirectional transaction rather than an earnest engagement), Belcourt continues: “My concern is not with being included in Native Studies – as if being included was all that we wanted – but with epistemologies that build worlds that can’t hold all of us. There might be collections written and scholars researching under the rubric of ‘Queer Indigenous Studies,’ but this does not mean that our work is being taken up in ways that recklessly generate radically new ways of being in the world” (“Can the Other,” n.p.). In his poetry and critical writing, Belcourt gestures to these radical new ways of worlding, as well as the limits to, but ultimately benefits of, engaging in this process of worlding.

In “Can the Other of Native Studies Speak?,” Belcourt problematizes the notion that “Indigenous men ... must be healed in order to later govern as Sovereigns” and ultimately ‘achieve’ or reach decolonization (“Can the Other,” n.p.). Belcourt addresses the rising tendency to emphasize the victimization of Indigenous men because it often positions men’s issues in opposition to (or at least, in competition with) those of women, queer, and two-spirited individuals, thereby monopolizing the visibility that these minority groups are already forced to vie for (“Can the Other,” n.p.). For Belcourt, the ultimate goal is not visibility (nor, as he notes, “being included”), since a decolonizing strategy that invests so heavily in the notion of masculinity – healthy or otherwise – binds the future of Native studies and Indigenous decolonization to the maintenance of a gender binary that has largely been harmful to those who are not cis-straight men. In reflecting on Dana Wesley’s question of whether or not “queer, trans, and two-spirit life would dwell inside [the] imagining ... [of] the future for Indigenous peoples,” Belcourt recognizes that a future preoccupied with notions of healthy masculinity is one that

further entrenches the very cis-heteropatriarchal structures that marginalize non cis-normative straight men (“Can the Other,” n.p.).

Belcourt’s ideas, as they came in up in my class, stood in stark contrast with the representations of masculinity that we had engaged with in the course, particularly those offered by Alfred and Alexie. And given Alexie’s active undermining of Indigenous women’s careers and his history of sexual abuse, the class became interested in how the immensely successful Alexie – often white audiences’ token Indigenous cultural producer – figures into Belcourt’s critique of Indigenous masculinities and “Native Studies’ Native.”⁴³ I bring up this anecdote to relay that, as a class, we came to the conclusion that the notions of Indigenous masculinity currently in vogue/circulation in academic and community discourses are impoverished, to say the least, and that they have catastrophic effects on the functioning of Indigenous studies in particular, and within Indigenous communities more generally. Because of this, we need to think critically about these discourses, and how they might foreclose on more radical futures offered by the work undertaken by queer, trans, and two-spirit Indigenous peoples. This chapter, then, focuses on this work and how it manifests in the everyday and in relation to the reciprocal obligations, or the lack thereof, enacted or enabled by Indigenous masculinities, and how these manifest in the critical and creative writings of Billy-Ray Belcourt.

WOUNDED WORLDS: INDIGENOUS MASCULINITIES’ (DIS)CONTENTS

Billy-Ray Belcourt is Cree from the Driftpile Cree Nation in Treaty Eight territory in Northern Alberta. Belcourt’s most recent book of poetry, *This Wound is a World* (2017),

⁴³ For more on how Alexie is white audiences’ “go to” Indigenous writer, see Lou Cornum’s “The Laughing Indian”: <https://thenewinquiry.com/the-laughing-indian/>

addresses a variety of issues, from (un)embodied knowledges, to the conditions of reserve life, to the processes of making a world or world-making. In an interview surrounding the release of his text, Belcourt proclaimed that he was “trying to figure out how to be in this world without wanting it,” and suggested that “perhaps this is what it is to be Indigenous” (Arts Everywhere). Belcourt and the community from which he hails, it is important to note, has also been subject to the toxic effects of the Swan Hills Waste Treatment Centre discussed in Chapter Four. He is specifically interested in how queer Indigenous peoples are compelled to inhabit a world that regularly harms them and which is thus, paradoxically, uninhabitable. Belcourt writes at the disciplinary boundaries of Indigenous studies and queer studies, proclaiming that he is “*of* but not *in*” either field (“Can the Other,” n.p.). This theoretical dexterity, or promiscuity, allows Belcourt to exist at the intersection(s) of queerness and Indigeneity, and to ask important questions about how both fields of study, as well as ways of being, relate/influence/inhabit/prohibit one another. Belcourt’s work is especially generative for addressing “the rise” of Indigenous masculinity studies, and indeed Belcourt himself has explored how queer Indigenous studies allows, and in some ways demands, a critical examination and calling to account of Indigenous masculinities and the socialities they offer and foreclose.⁴⁴

Critical Indigenous masculinities, as defined by two influential texts released in relative proximity to each other, *Masculindians* and *Indigenous Men and Masculinities: Legacies, Identities, Regeneration*, is complex and varied. According to Sam McKegney, in his collection of interviews entitled *Masculindians*, Indigenous masculinity “is a tool for describing the

⁴⁴ To be sure, this “rise” or preoccupation with Indigenous masculinities is in no way “new,” as Belcourt states that “[t]o say that “Indigenous Masculinities” is nascent or new is to duplicate and thus render Native Studies strange to itself (“Can the Other,” n.p.).

qualities, actions, characteristics, and behaviours that accrue meaning within a given historical context and social milieu through their association with maleness, as maleness is normalized, idealized, and even demonized within a web of power-laden interpenetrating discourses” (McKegney, “Introduction,” 3). McKegney continues that “[t]oo often conversations about Indigenous masculinity begin from a position of presumed deficit that unwittingly accepts the perverse ‘success’ of colonial policies of dispossession while obfuscating the living models of non-dominative and empowered Indigenous manhood that persist in families and communities, in teachings and stories, in minds and in actions” (McKegney, “Introduction,” 4). Speaking to this, Innes and Anderson, in their introduction to *Indigenous Men and Masculinities: Legacies, Identities, Regeneration*, write that “[c]entral to Indigenous masculinities is the examination of how the depth of Indigenous male dysfunctional behaviour has been caused by their internalization of the ideal masculine traits and characteristics, based on the white supremacist heteronormative patriarchy, imposed on them through a variety of colonial mechanisms” (pg. 11). They envision the study of Indigenous Masculinities as producing an “understanding of how race and gender bias intersect to disadvantage Indigenous men, and how this disadvantaged position has had negative ramifications for Indigenous communities” (Innes and Anderson 4).

However, Indigenous masculinities at times only appear to be configured or conceptualized in relation to their perceived “opposite,” which is to say Indigenous feminities or feminisms. As McKegney writes in a footnote in the introduction to *Masculindians*, a “recent report for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) ... demonstrate[s] that the conditions of Indigenous men are improving at a much slower pace than those of Indigenous women in Canada” (6). Moreover, Innes and Anderson similarly note that “[a] comparison of the murder statistics of Indigenous men and women in Canada compiled by Statistics Canada, researchers,

and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) provides insight into the degree to which the conditions of Indigenous men are not full acknowledged – or even understood” (5). They continue, “Indigenous men were victims of homicide nearly two and a half times more than Indigenous women” (6), and that “in the province of Saskatchewan, between 1940 and 2015, thirty-eight Indigenous men as compared to eighteen Indigenous women went missing” (7). My intention here is not to diminish the potential violences that Indigenous men face, but rather to point to the ways in which the study of Indigenous masculinities appears to constitute itself always *in opposition to* the violence faced by Indigenous women, and rarely, if ever, discusses in any significant detail the violence faced by trans or Two-Spirit peoples within Indigenous communities. Describing the work of Jennifer Mt. Pleasant, a journalist for *Vice News*, Innes and Anderson provide another comparison: “Over a nine-month period, Jennifer Mt. Pleasant searched various on-line and news sources and uncovered over 600 names of Indigenous men. *It should be noted that* Mt. Pleasant’s figure is higher than the original number of missing and murdered Indigenous women released by NWAC” (8, emphasis mine). The reason why this particular point “should be noted” is not elaborated, but the implicit assertion is that Indigenous men face *more* violence and violent deaths than Indigenous women as well as trans and Two-Spirit Indigenous peoples (who are not mentioned in the litany of statistics provided by Innes and Anderson at all), yet receives comparatively less (and thus, inadequate) attention.⁴⁵

Furthermore, in his interview with Sam McKegney in *Masculindians*, Taiaiake Alfred ruminates on the issues facing Indigenous men: “what’s the role of the Native male? [...] There’s

⁴⁵ Further, it is worth bearing in mind Sarah Hunt’s critique of NWAC’s (and other organizations) statistical information here: “The Assembly of First Nations, NWAC, and local organizations and individuals calling for women and girls to have political, economic, and social power and the restoration of traditional roles must begin to ask themselves how non-binary traditional and contemporary realities are being addressed in these efforts. Without this, the violence of colonial erasure is further advanced” (Hunt, “Embodying Self-Determination: Beyond the Gender Binary,” 113).

no channel, I guess, for productive masculinity in a productive way. You still constantly reproduce the image of all of those four that [McKegney] talked about – the absentee, the drunk, the tough guy, the warrior – and those are all anti-family messages” (79). While Alfred appears to recognize the dominant models of masculinity imposed upon Indigenous men, he still ascribes masculinity to bodies willing (or bodies that *should be* willing) to (re)produce “families.” Alfred, then, reinscribes the heteronormative conditions of masculinity, and prescribes the *telos* for Indigenous men and manhood. “[T]o recover something *meaningful* for Natives,” Alfred posits, “is to put the image of the Native male back into its proper context, which is in the family” (qtd. in McKegney, 70, italics mine) – and it is not a stretch to surmise that Alfred means ‘at the head’ of the family here. Alfred ends his discussion of masculinities with a disparaging comment about feminism(s), relegating it to the realm of liberal Canadian polite society: “I think most art is capitalist today, and most literature is very mainstream: it’s a typical kind of navel-gazing, middle-class, either feminist or politically correct multicultural Canadianism” (qtd. by McKegney, 86). Though there are certainly important critiques to be made of the white supremacist character of mainstream Canadian feminism, Alfred here lumps all feminisms together, dismissing them wholesale, including, implicitly, Indigenous feminisms.

While some Indigenous scholars and critics, such as Alfred, are quick to foreground reproduction and the Indigenous “family” in nation-building/resurgence efforts, I follow Leanne Simpson’s assertion that “creating life comes in many forms, not just from the womb, and it creates a space where all genders can have valuable, ethical, consensual, meaningful, and reciprocal relationships with all aspects of creation” (*As We’ve Always Done*, 121). This comment appears to revise or at least supplement Simpson’s emphatic assertion, made years earlier: “While I am not comfortable being confined to an essentialized version of Native

womanhood defined by child birth, I am also someone who has been profoundly transformed through giving birth, nursing and mothering. I will not apologize for fully participating in those ceremonies and honouring the teachings given to me through those ceremonies” (*Dancing On Our Turtle’s Back*, 60). In the former, more recent quotation, Simpson emphasizes the importance of gender diversity and challenges heteronormative kinship structures. Simpson’s contrasting quotations illustrate the way that Indigenous women and feminists in particular are more than willing to engage with the critiques and contributions of their queer and Two-Spirit kin in a way that Indigenous men, and proponents of Indigenous masculinity, appear not to be.

In relation to Indigenous masculinities, some Indigenous scholars place an emphasis on harm reduction in the current moment, while also seeing room for a radical reimagining of Indigenous masculinities, especially as they relate to Indigenous futures. Leey’qsun scholar Rachel Flowers asserts that “the move from men to recognize their role in violence and take on the responsibility for change might provide some relief from the crushing weight of the persistent denial of violence within our communities” (43). Indeed, “it is crucial,” she writes, “that we shift our mode of thinking away from ownership of community members, toward our own understandings of kin relations, the system of relationships wherefrom we derive our obligations and laws” (43). Cherokee writer/scholar Daniel Justice speaks in detail about the destitution of Indigenous masculinities as they are currently conceptualized. I quote Justice at length here:

What strikes me is the male body is seen as capable of and a source only of violence and harm. When that’s the only model you have, what a desolation, right? When your body, the only way your maleness is or should be rendered is through violence, through harm, through corrupted power. Oh, it’s just tragic. We need to see the body – the male body –as being a giver of pleasure, not just a

recipient of somebody else's acts, but a source of pleasure for the self and others [...] But the models of hypermasculine maleness that we get: if the male body isn't giving harm, it's taking pleasure. It's always extractive. It's either penetrative or extractive – either assaultive or extractive. One or the other, there's nothing else. And that is such a catastrophic failure of imagination, as well as a huge ethical breach. (qtd. in *Masculindians*, 144-5)

Indeed, as Justice states in an interview elsewhere, if Indigenous men, and those who assert Indigenous masculine identities, can “find ourselves loveable and extend that generosity to one another, I think we've done a great service to our People and the memory of our ancestors” (qtd. in “Strong Men Stories,” 264). Other Indigenous scholars, critics, and activists have argued that perhaps it is problematic to think that notions of “masculinity” or “femininity” can be dismissed entirely, nor that it would necessarily be constructive to do so. For example, notions of tender masculinity and/or harm reduction harken back to Audre Lorde's oft-quoted assertion that “our sons must become men – such men as we hope our daughters, born and unborn, will be pleased to live among” (73). Here, then, there might be room for the fostering of “healthy masculinities,” though ones wherein the fate of both Native studies and Indigenous peoples does not hinge upon the *en masse* actualization of this sole desire, and ones that are not premised on the reproduction of either heteronormativity nor the gender binary.

WORLDING: BELCOURT'S CRITICAL AND CREATIVE WRITING

According to Mi'kmaq scholar Bonita Lawrence, settler colonialism creates “classificatory systems” that “produce a way of thinking – a grammar – that embeds itself in every attempt to change it” (4). Similarly, Sarah Hunt describes how “categorization” is “a

process through which world views and ontologies come into being,” wherein certain ideas/bodies can become “an impossibility through their categorical omission” (14). For Billy-Ray Belcourt, “the grammar of Indigenous studies misapprehends the tumult of everyday life” (“Indigenous Studies Beside Itself,” 182). Belcourt, then, recognizes the often-maligned status of the everyday in Indigenous studies, as efforts are normally put in service of larger macropolitical issues like “the land” and “sovereignty.” What is often lost in these orientations, however, are not only the daily violences and resistances faced and enacted by Indigenous peoples (and bodies), but also the ways in which the macropolitical and micropolitical are intertwined and in conversation. Regularly omitted in discussions of macropolitical issues are the ways in which embodied knowledges influence macropolitical orders, as well as the ways in which Two-Spirit or queer Indigenous community members are often excluded from narratives about mass movements in the contemporary moment, even as they shape these movements, and have shaped them historically. As Sarah Hunt writes, “[r]ecounting and reclaiming this history [has] been central to validating the lives of diversely gendered Indigenous peoples today as integral to the sociocultural and governance practices of Indigenous nations” (107). Further to this point, Qwo-Li Driskill remarks that Indigenous “Two-Spirit/queer people position ourselves and our identities as productive, if not central, to nationalist, decolonial agendas” (77). For these authors, “actively decolonizing the very process of decolonization is just as important as achieving Indigenous communities’ political end-goals” (Arvin, Tuck, Morill 15).

By emphasizing this concern for the place of queer Indigeneity in the “everyday” in his work, Belcourt is not simply interested in how Indigenous studies is constituted by “Native Studies’ Native” – that is to say, the masculinist figure of the man-on-the-land, Indigenous warrior – but he is also concerned with how narrow ideas of gender and sexuality manifest in

relationships within Indigenous communities more broadly. In “the Poltergeist Manifesto,” Belcourt describes the case of Tyler Alan Jacobs, a Two-Spirit coast Salish person from the Squamish nation, whose story “captur[es] at once the terror of queer life on reserve and the hardening of time into a thing that slows down bodies and pushes them outside its securitized geographies” (“Poltergeist,” 25). Jacobs was physically assaulted for being queer and Indigenous and inhabiting a space “not designed” for him. Belcourt points to the complex fact that “Jacobs had grown up with his attackers,” which is to say that his attackers were known by him – perhaps they were even his kin. And yet, these very “attackers ... were energized by the pronouncement of his queerness – how it insisted on being noticed, how it insisted on being” (“Poltergeist,” 25). To Belcourt, settler colonialism turns our “people into grim reapers who must choose which lives are worth keeping in the world,” a world defined according to settler colonialism’s logics and structures of (cis-hetero masculine) feeling (“Poltergeist,” 25). The toxicity of masculinities on reserve (and off) enable and prevent certain forms of relations; and the relations that our nations *currently* engender are often circumscribed by these settler colonial logics.

Arvin, Tuck, and Morill describe this process in a historical sense, writing that the “heteropaternal organization of citizens into nuclear families, each expressing a ‘proper,’ modern sexuality, has been a cornerstone in the production of a citizenry that will support and bolster the nation-state” (14). And following this organization (or operating concurrently with it), as “settler nations sought to disappear Indigenous peoples’ complex structures of government and kinship, the management of Indigenous peoples’ gender roles and sexuality was also key in remaking Indigenous peoples into settler state citizens” (Arvin, Tuck, and Morill 15). Speaking to this fact as well, Belcourt argues that “[s]ettler colonialism is fundamentally affective: it takes hold of the body, makes it perspire, and wears it out. It converts flesh into pliable automations ... It can turn

a person into a murderer in a matter of seconds; it is an *epistemic rupturing of our attachments to life, to each other, and to ourselves*” (“Poltergeist,” 25, italics mine). Belcourt does not mention the case of Tyler Alan Jacobs for any sensationalist reason, rather he “rehearse[s] this case because it allows [him] to risk qualifying the reserve as a geography saturated with heteronormative socialities” (“Poltergeist,” 25). This example illustrates how particular Indigenous spaces can be hostile to more expansive notions of kinship, of a queer being and operating in space, especially Indigenous spaces. That is to say, Belcourt enunciates how manifestations of settler colonial cis-heteronormativity can inhibit our ‘ecologies of intimacy’ with one another (Simpson, *As We’ve Always*, 97). He also frames this description as “a risk” since the reserve is a geographic space over-saturated by a contested field of signifiers *in both* Indigenous and settler imaginaries. What he is speaking to here is a recognition that Indigenous theories are always ‘at risk’ of being co-opted by settler regimes of thought to confirm and affirm settler colonialism’s constitutive biases; and yet, for Belcourt, it is worth flirting with, or being in proximity to these biases to get at the larger issues affecting Indigenous studies and Indigenous communities more broadly.

This idea of “risk” also comes from Belcourt’s recognition of the tendency of settlers to always already read Indigenous peoples through what Unangax scholar Eve Tuck refers to as “damage-centred narratives.” Tuck, in her letter to communities entitled “Suspending Damage,” cautions against “reinforc[ing] and reinscrib[ing] a one-dimensional notion of ... [Indigenous] people as depleted, ruined, and hopeless” (409). In a similar vein queer, Creek-Cherokee scholar Craig Womack warns against readings and critical responses that are “deficit-oriented,” ones that foreground “some problem with [an Indigenous] nation’s coherence” above all else (80). Indeed, Womack outlines how ‘deficit-oriented’ engagements with Indigenous communities and peoples,

as well as the forms of cultural production they produce, prioritize and are mainly interested in a “relatively conservative fiction that prioritizes issues of personal ... recovery over political analysis” (80). These narratives fail to account for what Tuck, following Avery Gordon, refers to as the “complex personhood” of Indigenous peoples, and indeed the complexity of our communities. “Complex personhood,” Tuck writes, “draws on Indigenous understandings of collectivity and the interdependence of the collective *and* the person rather than on the Western focus on the individual” (420, italics mine).

What I want to foreground here is that, though damage-centered research tends to index problems faced by Indigenous communities that are in fact the product of historical and ongoing contexts of colonization, “the significance of these contexts,” Tuck writes, “is regularly submerged” (418). In other words, “[w]ithout [attending to] the context of racism and colonization, all we’re left with is the damage, and this makes our stories vulnerable to pathologizing analyses” (415). In response and counter to these modes of analysis, Tuck suggests a framework of desire-based research, one that is “concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and self-determination of lived lives” (416). These alternative modes of analyzing are “intent on depathologizing the experiences of dispossessed and disenfranchised communities so that people are seen as more than broken and conquered” (416), and even if “communities are broken and conquered, they are so much more than that – so much more that this incomplete story is an act of aggression” (416). For Tuck, desire-based frameworks are “an antidote to damage-centered research,” in that “[a]n antidote stops and counteracts the effects of a poison, and the poison [she is] referring to here is not the supposed damage of Native communities, ... but the frameworks that position these communities as damaged” (417). Ultimately, desire-based

frameworks “docu[ment] not only the painful elements of social realities but also the wisdom and hope” (416).

Avoiding damage-centered narratives, however, does not demand the erasure of negative affects, as these are part of the complex personhood Tuck and Gordon emphasize. Indeed, Belcourt insists on the need for negative affects or a regime of negative affects, for it opens up a possibility for a shift in semantic signifiers. Belcourt stresses that “a part of this larger project of mine [is] to not shy away from negativity and bad affects: feelings like sadness, upset, guilt, etc. I think that as a student of Indigenous studies, I see this blinding emphasis on sovereignty, self-determination, governance, and the other words and terms, which require us to disavow the bad to try to story one another via positive affects. And I think that creates a whole visual terrain that can’t be seen via those optics” (Johns n.p.). Belcourt continues that it is “especially important to ask who the tenants of the terrain of bad affect are,” stating that they “are primarily Indigenous women, queer, trans, Indigenous two-spirit peoples” (Johns n.p.). Belcourt’s words here resonate with Sara Ahmed’s (2010) assertions that “to consider happiness as a form of world making is to consider how happiness makes the world cohere around, as it were, the right people” (13). The use of “right” here refers to how the impositions of happiness are often wielded as “straightening devices, ways of aligning bodies with what is already lined up” (Ahmed 91). Ahmed continues that “the points that accumulate as lines can be performatives: a point on a line can be a demand to stay in line,” and these demands have the potential to foreclose on the productive possibilities of ‘bad’ or ‘negative’ affects (91).

Reflecting on these negative affects and their potential to disrupt dominant worlds or ways of being, Belcourt posits: “Sovereignty, for example, requires us to think of the body as a closed system, as if we’re post something like ... leakage [...] But I’m saying no, there are these

instances where it feels like our bodies are falling apart, being undone, redone, and that's what happens in the domain of everyday life. That is what we have to pay attention to, because that is where world can be both made and shattered. It's a site of profound feeling" (Johns, n.p.).⁴⁶ Ultimately, Belcourt urges us to think through how negative affects can serve as reminders that the ways we currently practice our kinship relations sometimes fail to account for all of our connections to each other, including queer and two-spirit Indigenous peoples, as well as the land and our other-than-human kin. If the modes of kinship that we currently have at our disposal are ill-equipped to allow us to affirm these messy, entangled relations, then perhaps we need to reimagine them, which in turn requires us to contend with the possibility that this might not be possible in the world as it is currently constructed. Belcourt points to vulnerability as a potential site of cohesion, since "[vulnerability] is also an affective of commons and we are in it with one another, which enables us to dream up a future in which vulnerability is not about being subject to the actions of racist others, but is about falling apart in a good way" (Johns n.p.). Next, I turn to Belcourt's poetry to investigate the ways in which Indigenous peoples can 'fall apart' together in a 'good way,' that is to say, in a way that acknowledges our reciprocal obligations to each other, obligations that are routinely violated by oppressive systems or modes of thought such as masculinity, heteropatriarchy, and the gender binary.

In his poem "Something like Love," Belcourt articulates how, for queer Indigenous peoples, there "are days when being in life feels like consenting to the cruelties that hold up the world" (41). These cruelties manifest in a variety of ways, but one tangible way they manifest is

⁴⁶ While my focus throughout this project has been Indigenous notions of kinship (even if Indigenous writers/scholars/artists/communities do not frame their work like this exactly), I recognize the generative potential of similar formulations in areas such as Blackness Studies. Fred Moten might refer to the processes that Belcourt is outlining here as about being "more and less than one" (2017), or what Denise Ferreira da Silva refers to as "difference without separability" (2016).

through the prism of (Indigenous) masculinities. If, as Innes and Anderson remark, Indigenous masculinities are about “the ways in which Indigenous men, and those who assert Indigenous masculine identities, perform their identities, why and how they perform them and the consequences to them and others because of their attachment to those identities” (4), then Belcourt is interested in how in “attach[ing] masculinity to the decolonial future,” how this “might mean ... repudiate[ing] queer life as such – queerness being that which germinates all over the place, without or beyond the aegis of gender” (“Can the Other,” n.p.). Belcourt continues that “[i]f masculinity is an object we attach to, because we think we need it to keep going, I want to know what that object stands in for because no attachment is neutral” (“Can the Other,” n.p.). We might also ask: who is the presumed subject that is desiring of that object? (It is likely *not* a queer or Two-Spirit Indigenous person.) Similar sentiments appear in Belcourt’s creative work, which he has referred to elsewhere as a “phenomenology of decaying worlds” (“Meditations on Reserve Life,” 5). Quoting Sara Ahmed, he notes that “[p]henomenology is suited for the study of reserve life, as it ... ‘allows us to theorize how a reality is given by becoming background, as that which is taken for granted’” (“Meditations on Reserve Life,” 5). These theorizations of reserve life manifest in particular ways in Belcourt’s poetry.

In the poem “Sacred,” Belcourt points to the way that imposed masculinist narratives of decolonization can repudiate queer life, writing, “I think about the time an elder told me to be a man and to decolonize in the same breath” (*This Wound*, 17).⁴⁷ Belcourt indexes numerous points at which ceremonial spaces become oversaturated as heteronormative geographies, in a sense refusing these as spaces of queerness or barring queerness from these spaces. Belcourt

⁴⁷ My reading echoes that of Daniel Justice in his recently released text, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (2018). While I wrote this section of this chapter before I had a chance to engage with Justice’s reading, I have found the write-up he provides very generative.

illustrates this denial, noting that “a native man looks me in the eyes as he refuses to hold my hand / during a round dance” (*This Wound*, 17). Daniel Justice describes this interaction as a “gutting scene of abject rejection at a moment when connection is the whole point of coming together in this time and place” (i.e., the round dance) (*Why Indigenous Literatures*, 108). “To refuse a hand,” Justice elaborates, “is to break the circle, and a round dance broken is a connection unrealized, simply because the man is presumably threatened by what he imagines the speaker represents” (*Why Indigenous Literatures*, 108). Further, referencing the intimate, symbolic, and very real material violences that these spaces can be infused with, the speaker also remarks how the hand-refusing man’s “pupils are like bullets” (Belcourt, *This Wound*, 17).

Not only do the bullets signify the violence involved in denying this intimate act in a ceremonial setting, but it also gestures to the bodily harm that these masculinist displays against vulnerability may manifest as (which is to say, as actual bullets or other means of distributing harm). Belcourt also describes how space itself is weaponized in settings that are hostile to queer bodies, remarking how “the gap between him and i keeps getting / bigger” (*This Wound*, 17). For Belcourt, these spaces are populated by “men who have built cages out of broken boys,” with the cage here being not only the body itself, but more specifically a hypermasculine body that regulates varied gender enunciations/articulations (*This Wound*, 9). This portrayal resonates with Chris Finley’s description of how cis-heteronormative ceremonial and reserve spaces can be defined by potentially violent “masculinist discourses” that are tethered to, and mobilized by, forms of “traditionalism in Native communities” (38). Belcourt echoes this in his critical writing when he states that “to approximate indigeneity, you must approximate tradition in this way and not that, *or else*” (“Poltergeist,” 29, emphasis mine). Finley also rejects a romanticizing of traditionalism that frames Indigenous peoples “as existing outside of homophobic discourse or as

more accepting of trans and queer people in Native communities because of traditional Native ideas regarding gender and sexuality” (38). Such romantic narratives can not only erase or minimize actually existing homophobia within contemporary Indigenous communities, but as Sarah Hunt also points out, “it is important to avoid generalized statements that idealize pre-contact Indigenous societies as uniformly balanced, accepting, and appreciative of non-gender-conforming individuals” – this insight extends to varying sexualities as well (108).

Belcourt, however, still yearns for something resembling intimate ecologies or kinship. Speaking of the man who would not hold hands in ceremony, he asks, “i wonder what / kind of pain he’s been through to not want me in this world” (*This Wound*, 17). In many ways, Belcourt asks this question because kinship “makes meaning of the relationships that define who we are and what *our place is in the world*,” and in this instance, the speaker in Belcourt’s poem is being denied this space at this Indigenous site, in a geography sacred to Indigenous communities (*Why Indigenous Literatures*, 75, emphasis mine). If kinship is supposed to “remin[d] us of our duties, our rights and responsibilities, and the consequences and transformative possibilities of our actions,” then in this instance we see the breaking down of kinship relations, as members of a community purposefully exclude queer Indigenous members from ceremonial practices (Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures*, 75). Thus, as Justice also illustrates, when kinship relations ‘fail,’ it demonstrates “what we lose when those relationships are broken or denied to us” (*Why Indigenous Literatures*, 75). This loss can be felt on both sides, as the speaker of Belcourt’s poem feels this alienation from a sacred Indigenous time and space, but also the man refusing his touch denies himself the transformative possibilities of expansive notions of kinship, ones he is not even aware of – that is to say, this denial maintains things as they are in a settler colonial context.

This gap between Belcourt and the man, however, is perhaps a generative space, as out of it can emerge queer Indigenous publics and socialities, ones wherein bodies like Belcourt's can be sacred. Belcourt desires to people these sites with queer Indigeneity; he "fill[s]" the gap between him and the man "with the memories of native boys who couldn't be / warriors because their bodies were too fragile to carry all of that / anger" (*This Wound*, 17). And while Belcourt claims he is "too queer to / be sacred anymore," he still "dance[s] that broken circle dance because [he is] still / waiting for hands that want to hold [his] too" (*This Wound*, 17). When these hands arrive in another poem ("Okcupid"), and are paired with another queer Indigenous body, Belcourt posits that "to be native and queer / [...] is to bandage the wounds with strangers / you met an hour ago" (*This Wound*, 33). In this instance, the sacred becomes the meeting of these two queer brown bodies, and "sex" becomes "ceremony" (33). It is in opposition to cis-heteronormative logics of masculinity that Belcourt writes, projecting instead worlds wherein queer Indigenous bodies and the socialities they create are not only free from harm, but are flourishing. Addressing this flourishing, the speaker in Belcourt's poem posits:

 this was different / because time stops / and is made anew / when two native boys
 / find each other's bodies / and write poems about it afterwards / because each kiss
 was an act of defiance / a kind of nation-building effort / our bodies were
 protesting / dancing in a circle / to the beat of a different drum / that was also a /
 world in and of itself (*This Wound*, 33)

Here, Belcourt explicitly references the worlding that queer Indigeneity participates in, creating a space wherein queer Indigenous peoples are central to 'nation-building efforts.' Further, in these spaces, the body or queer embodiment is a defiant act (even if it is momentary) – it becomes cacophonous refusal. Although Belcourt posits that "there are days when [he] want[s] to wear /

nail polish more than [he] want[s] to protest,” ultimately he “remember[s] that [he] / wasn’t meant to live life here and [he] paint[s] [his] nails because 1) it looks cute and 2) it is a protest” (*This Wound*, 33). For Belcourt, acts of queer Indigenous refusal provide space for the flowering of new Indigenous lifeworlds, ones wherein the prisons of imposed heteronormative masculinity do not hinder or prevent nascent forms of being in the world and being with one another.

(AD)DRESSING WOUNDS: EXPANSIVE KINSHIP INSIDE AND OUT

While Belcourt’s poems do not necessarily cohere around a geographical site explicitly, the titles and content of his poems reference the Northern Alberta landscape from which he originates. Belcourt not only has a poem entitled “Ode to Northern Alberta” (*This Wound*, 42), but he also describes the setting of one of his poems as occurring or being situated “in a small town made up of oil dreams and soured masculinity” (*This Wound*, 19). The masculinist narratives around resource extraction abound in Northern Alberta and the prairies, as images of rugged, hard-working, and industrious farmers, rig workers (commonly referred to as “rig pigs”), and labourers predominate in popular culture imaginaries (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous). As Milnes and Haney note, when “men are afforded more decision-making power,” especially around resource development/extraction, the “cumulative impact on the environment is larger and more deleterious, owing in large part to governance focused on control, domination and hierarchy – all traditionally masculine qualities” (262). However, the boom-bust economy of the prairies, and Alberta in particular, creates a whole host of precarious labour conditions as these masculine enterprises are at the whim of a market that busts just as much as it has oil-soaked booms. In fact, the economy in Alberta more generally is defined by early twentieth-century booms (fueled by land speculation and mineral extraction hopes), followed by a twenty-first-

century boom-bust economy of resource extraction (and its attendant social ills). Some of these social ills are responses to these ‘oil dreams’ drying up, producing in their wake the “soured” masculinities to which Belcourt refers.

For example, a hyperbolic headline for *Vice News* reads “How the Sputtering Oil and Gas Industry Is Destroying Men.” The article proceeds to outline how “[f]ew industries conjure up an image of raw masculinity in their workforce in quite the same way that fossil fuel exploration and extraction does” (Urwin, n.p.). Indeed, Urwin contends that conceptualizations of “oil and gas” and its gendered articulations “still ten[d] to sit somewhere between that of brawny manual laborer and high-flying alpha finance dog; the intersection of two classic macho work environments” (n.p.). These work environments, however, are collapsing, producing a “fractured masculinity in Alberta wrought by the severe decline of oil” (Urwin, n.p.). As Urwin writes, since “jobs [are] so closely linked to the very ideals of masculinity to which boys and men have historically been taught to aspire,” then with the crashing of the oil and gas economy, men in resource extraction areas have engaged in hypermasculine displays of violence and “antisocial behaviour” (Urwin, n.p.). If the notion of masculinity is so tethered to resource extraction, perhaps we should, following the *Vice News* headline, hope for these masculinities to be destroyed, for they harm systems of connection that Indigenous peoples have with one another, as well as kinship obligations that Indigenous peoples have with their other-than-human kin. We should value these kinship relations, for as Belcourt notes, the “crows and flies ... don't care about gender” and the normative relationships its binary prescribes (Belcourt, *This Wound*, 9). Ultimately, Urwin articulates the hopes and dangers of this collapsing economic order, writing that “until either the oil economy picks up again or something is done to reach out to isolated young men on the fringes of the industry, things are only going to get worse for [these] towns”

(n.p.).⁴⁸ The question of *who* things get worse for is of particular concern as well, since the proliferation of “man camps” to house these men working in these resource extraction industries has resulted in an increasing number of instances of sexual violence against Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit peoples. As the Women’s Earth Alliance and Native Youth Sexual Health Network insist, with “such a concentration of men, money, drugs, and isolation, the rates of sexual violence have risen in many of these industry-impacted communities” (30).

This trope or narrative – that men have to be saved or redeemed in order for things to improve or not deteriorate further – in many ways re-centers cis-heteronormative, masculinist formations of being in the world. In the case of the *Vice* article, it specifically centers white men, albeit implicitly. White masculinity is often positioned as distinct from (healthy/traditional) Indigenous masculinities. As Innes and Anderson write, “the performance of Indigenous masculinities has been profoundly impacted by colonization and the imposition of a white supremacist heteronormative patriarchy that has left a lasting and negative legacy for Indigenous women, children, Elders, men, and their communities as a whole” (4). They continue that “the regeneration of positive masculinities currently taking place in many communities [...] will assist in the restoration of balanced and harmonious relationships” (4). The goal, essentially, is “toward achieving healthy Indigenous masculinities” (4). However, as Belcourt views it, “[t]hat masculinity becomes an object of inquiry – indeed, one that can remedy the social – is symptomatic of a kind of shortcutting whereby the future is thought vis-à-vis the analytics of the present, a present that, by all means, isn’t good for most of us” (“Can the Other,” n.p.). Put more

⁴⁸ However, this hope for the economy to “pick up” can be described as an instance of what queer scholar Lauren Berlant refers to as “cruel optimism.” For Berlant, optimism is cruel “when the object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or a people risks striving; and, doubly, it is cruel insofar as the very pleasures of being inside a relation have become sustaining regardless of the content of the relation, such that a person or a world finds itself bound to a situation of profound threat that is, at the same time, profoundly confirming” (2).

simply, the “normative project of ‘Indigenous Masculinities,’ to Belcourt, is “to make a healthy masculinity for Indigenous men in order to repair the social” (“Can the Other,” n.p.). The field of Indigenous masculinity studies, and Indigenous masculinities more broadly, is invested in a movement that repositions, or reifies, ‘Man as sovereign’ at the forefront of broader Indigenous collectives. Belcourt, recognizing the bereft sites open to other forms of being (particularly queer or non-normative ones) when masculinity is prioritized and re-prioritized, stages his creative and critical work as an intervention into these reifications that position Indigenous masculinities at the forefront of Indigenous communities.

In a follow-up blogpost on Indigenous masculinities, and in response to Belcourt’s “Can the Other of Native Studies’ Speak?” (though not explicitly framed as such), Robert Innes recognizes the “criticisms” put forth by Indigenous scholars, but proceeds to state that “these criticisms have not been well articulated” (n.p.).⁴⁹ Innes more or less provides a resounding “no” to Belcourt’s initial title and provoking question. This fact is demonstrated through Innes failing to acknowledge or engage with Belcourt’s primary thesis, which is that “[t]o say that ‘Indigenous Masculinities’ is nascent or new is to duplicate and thus render Native Studies strange to itself [...] Native Studies is confronted with itself insofar as its revolutionary subject has stubbornly taken the form of the Red Power-like warrior” (“Can the Other,” n.p.). That is to say that Native Studies’ Native has always been masculine. Paraphrasing Lee Maracle, Belcourt notes that “the ‘woman question’ surfaced in the shadows of the question of ‘Native self-government’ and ‘the Native land question,’ questions putatively bereft of [gendered] identity politics but ones that

⁴⁹ Belcourt’s blogpost was published on February 1st, 2016, with Innes’ post following in March of 2016. Given the proximity of the publishing dates, as well as the title of Innes’ post being “What is Indigenous Masculinity Studies?,” it is not a stretch to say that Innes’ write-up is in many ways a direct response to Belcourt, even if it fails to mention him or his blogpost by name.

nonetheless made the ‘Native woman’ into something of an ontological nothing, rendered as the object against [which] Nativeness – only ever properly male – would take shape” (“Can the Other,” n.p.). Innes, in attempting to engage with Belcourt, asserts that “Indigenous masculinities as a project” will not “simply reinforce and maintain the white supremacist, heteronormative, patriarchal male power structures that disadvantage and disenfranchise Indigenous women and queer people” (n.p.). As we have already seen, however, and as Belcourt has positioned it, Indigenous masculinity is in many ways already conditioned or constituted by these logics, and by attributing this constitution solely to white supremacy or whiteness, it fails to acknowledge or hold accountable the many ways that Indigenous men are engaging in these harmful acts now. In this way, Innes’s statement is what Ahmed (2012) might describe as “non-performative”: it does not do what it says it does, because it refuses to grapple with the way Indigenous masculinities already reinforces ‘white supremacist, heteronormative, patriarchal male power structures.’

In this way, the field of Indigenous masculinity studies continually defers or relegates the issues of (toxic) masculinity to an external imposition, a white supremacist outside, without accounting for its wild permutations within our communities (which Belcourt takes pains to articulate in his poetry as well as his critical work). Indigenous masculinity studies also relies on a romanticized version of Indigenous communities or “tradition” that puts forth the assertion that Indigenous communities historically have had few (or zero) problems with issues resembling masculinist domination. If we can acknowledge the complexity of Indigenous communities – their governance structures, their varied and nuanced articulations of gender – should we not also be hesitant to cast the same homogenizing view of masculinity as it has manifested in communities historically and as it exists today?

While I acknowledge that making room for this complexity risks potentially affirming narratives put forth by settler imaginaries that Indigenous men are “barbarians” and that settlement was and is, in some ways, a benevolent project designed “to save” Indigenous women and children, I think it is also incumbent on us not to attribute masculinist violence in Indigenous academic circles and non-academic communities as *always* and/or *only* a product of white supremacy. At what point does “internalization” become constitutive or consolidated fact? Or, put another way, is it possible for Indigenous masculinities to “right the wrongs that brought them into being” (Belcourt qtd. by Mousseau, n.p.)? Indeed, we need to think of and practice more expansive ways of being with one another, which is to say ways that do not recapitulate the same formative logics upon which our worlds are currently structured. As Qwo-Li Driskill writes, “[i]nstead of seeing decolonization as something that has a fixed and finite goal, decolonial activism and scholarship ask us to radically reimagine our futures,” and, ultimately to continually enact those futures (70). One way to do this is to focus on or center good kinship relations *now*, and not wait for the perpetually-always-in-the-offing worlds offered by healthy masculinities. What would our reciprocal obligations to each other look like if we did not have to wait on Indigenous men to get their acts together or hold each other accountable in meaningful ways?⁵⁰ If Indigenous women, queer, and Two-Spirit peoples have been foundational to Indigenous communities and their survivance historically, why must the futurities we imagine for ourselves be conscribed by the re-emergence of a masculinity that can be mobilized in a

⁵⁰ Here I acknowledge my positionality as a cis-gender Indigenous person. However, I should also state that in relation to masculinity, and the world it props up, I accept Belcourt’s invitation when he writes: “investment is the social practice whereby one risks losing it all to be a part of something that feels like release. lose everything with me” (*This Wound*, 31). What I mean here is that I am willing to risk losing everything to see what a world without the gender binary, and the harmful masculinities it imposes, looks and feels like, because that is what an expansive notion of kinship entails. At the same time, I recognize that there is much work to be done, both as individuals and in community to make such a world possible.

variety of harmful ways (often times against these vary same foundational bodies)? Anishinaabe scholar Dory Nason asks “all of us to think about what it means for men, on the one hand, to publicly profess an obligation to ‘protect our women’ and, on the other, take leadership positions that uphold patriarchal forms of governance” (n.p). Perhaps we can take this one step further and ask why the only forms of governance (supposedly) available are so dependent on the eminence of a “healthy masculinity,” one that reifies cis-normative notions of the gender binary, and, to paraphrase Belcourt, is not good for most us?

KINSHIP NOW: OTHER WAYS OF BEING IN THE WORLD

Expanding upon how Indigenous writers articulate varying modes of relating with one another, Daniel Justice asserts: “Different writers will necessarily foreground different ways and different engagements, with some highlighting biology and others emphasizing more expansive notions of kinship” (75). Moreover, some articulations that prioritize “heteronormative notions of family,” or foreground notions of masculinity (in all its permutations), risk “obscur[ing] other, more generative and generous possibilities of belonging” (Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures*, 102). Indeed, as Haraway writes, dominant discourses “evoke, trigger, and call forth what—and who—exists,” and how they exist in relation to one another in an ethical (or unethical) way (Haraway 16). And as Justice further articulates: “Kinship ... is a messy thing. It’s about what happens when bodies and imaginations come together in relationship, when boundaries are breached and something else comes into being, for good or ill – or, sometimes, for both” (*Why Indigenous Literatures*, 104). Put a different way, Haraway asks: “What must be cut and what must be tied if multispecies flourishing on earth, including human and other-than-human beings in kinship, are to have a chance” (2)? New or expansive forms of kinship, then, in some ways

necessitate a being outside of ourselves or our bodies, in an enmeshed set of relations that are beyond the limits of the body that are imposed by cisheteronormative and patriarchal forms of sovereignty and masculinity.

According to Belcourt, the imaginaries and material effects of “settler colonialism wor[k] up modes of being-in-the-world that narrate themselves as the only options we have” (“Poltergeist,” 24). What this can produce is a hesitancy to think of different ways of being with one another, or being undone by one another, and instead focus more on the macropolitical issues that can sometimes impede better ways of engaging with our relations in the everyday. For Belcourt, the generative potential of queer Indigeneity, in contrast to something like Indigenous masculinities, is that it “requires us to abandon a whole host of ways of thinking and ways of knowing because for so long Indigeneity could only be configured as one locus of experience: that the Indian was X, Y, Z” (Johns, n.p.). These configurations are “almost always ... a heteronormative and cisnormative rendering, so now when we see people making claim to queerness, to transness, to two-spiritness who are also Indigenous it troubles epistemology as such. It troubles thought” (Belcourt qtd. in Johns, n.p.). Belcourt, however, while interested in troubling these larger, predominantly masculine obsessions, also recognizes their appeal to Indigenous communities, peoples, and scholars. As he writes, the “lure of sovereignty emerges from a quotidian mode of putting faith in categories that make at least some sense of the muck of affective life” (“Indigenous Studies Beside Itself,” 182). However, this “making sense” can often sometimes become the *sine qua non* of Indigenous studies and politics more broadly, taking precedence over being together in a good way, or holding community members accountable for their actions and the potentially harmful ways they orient themselves in the world. Further, in describing issues of sovereignty, the land, and other macropolitical concerns as ‘masculine

obsessions,' my intention here is not to say that Indigenous women, queer, and Two-Spirit peoples are not preoccupied with or engaged in these issues as well; rather what I am positing is that they often focus on these issues in different ways, and alongside (rather than in opposition to) the whole host of other entanglements they have with other beings, be they their familial kin, other-than-human kin, or more expansive notions of kinship including the cosmos.

Belcourt's own critical writing gestures to the necessity of these more expansive notions of kinship and the liberatory potentials they offer. He suggests that "we may attune to a different frequency or a different set of intimacies, modes of thinking, and enactments of care that would enable a more robust feeling of livability" (Mousseau, n.p.). Indeed, he is interested in "gamb[ing] with the possibility of something beyond sadness or misery or sorrow ... to speculate about something like a queer indigenous future in particular" (qtd. in Mousseau, n.p.). Haraway similarly asks "if people everywhere looked ... to individuals and collectives in queer, decolonial, and indigenous worlds," instead of in "rich and wealth-extracting sectors," then what types of "kinnovations," as she terms them, might arise (Haraway, 209)? With that said, I am also weary of attributing or ascribing the formulation and eventual flourishing of these new forms of expansive kinship relations solely to Indigenous women, queer, and Two-Spirit peoples – too often these groups are tasked with saving the world from the ills created by extractive, kin-obliterating, predominantly masculine, harmful activities. Rather, what I want to suggest is that the (renewed) focus on Indigenous masculinities can delimit or foreclose on our horizons of imagining things differently, and that queer Indigeneity offers one possible pathway for shifting away from "repair and toward Indigenous flourishing" (Belcourt qtd. in Mousseau, n.p.). In his poem "Towards a Theory of Decolonization," Belcourt writes that "investment is the social practice whereby one risks losing it all to be a part of something that feels like release"

(*This Wound*, 31). This ‘losing it all’ opens up a world of thriving as opposed to simply surviving, as Belcourt states elsewhere that “[s]urvival is an impoverished goal” (Mousseau n.p.). Belcourt, then, is against a rhetoric or mode of being in the world that takes “survival” as its *telos*, and rather is interested in cultivating worlds that are good for all of us, ones wherein “no one is falling apart in a bad way” (*This Wound*, 13). Indeed, Belcourt advocates for new ways of operating that account for all of our entanglements with one another, and that do not foreclose on queer Indigenous futurities through the prism of Indigenous masculinities. In so doing, we might be able to “build our own communities of care and love” (Belcourt qtd. in Mousseau, n.p.). Through the critical and creative writing of Belcourt, Indigenous peoples in Treaty Eight territory and beyond can potentially glimpse a world wherein all of their kin are accounted for and cared for, and where their futures are not tethered to the ascension of healthy masculinities that reinscribe cis-heteronormative notions of the gender binary – indeed, a world wherein we can be undone by one another, in a good way.

Chapter 6: Conclusion: Everyday Relationalities in Treaty Eight Territory

“Native stories are seldom about separate parallel existences but about intricately linked relationships and intersections”

—Kimberley M. Blaeser (Anishinaabe), “Like ‘Reeds through the Ribs of a Basket’ ...”

“When we start to link up with other individuals and communities engaged in everyday acts of resurgence by refusing the divisions of colonial spatialities, networks, or constellations, emerge”

—Leanne Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg), *As We Have Always Done*

This project has attempted to do a few things. It has attempted to show that a disproportionate amount of attention has been paid to larger, macropolitical projects at the expense or in lieu of prolonged engagements with the everyday, intimate relations in which Indigenous peoples are embedded (with other Indigenous peoples, non-Indigenous peoples, and other-than-human kin). I have considered how and why the quotidian ways in which we relate to one another are often elided, neglected, or derisively dismissed in favour of the oft-labelled “important projects” in Indigenous studies, namely land and jurisdictional issues, among other things. Billy-Ray Belcourt, the focus of Chapter 4, writes: “Indigenous studies needs to think in the small worlds of the ordinary and the biological, not only in the big worlds of the court or the House of Commons” (“Meditations,” 15). I have argued that not only are everyday kinship relations bound up in these larger, imperative projects to Indigenous studies, but also that a focus on these relations might help in remedying or eliminating altogether the larger issues currently

afflicting us in our studies and in our on the ground projects. As Kim Blaeser has written in relation to Indigenous literature(s), but which is just as applicable to our obligations to one another, everything begins at “a sacred center (which might be a place, person, event, etc.) from which emanate[s] ripples of power and connection (and might involve healing, return, forgiveness, etc.)” (58). Similarly, Leanne Simpson has written about this ripple effect, arguing that, in Indigenous communities, “teaching is often visualized as a spiral, starting with the individual and radiating upwards and outwards with the circles gradually becoming larger” and eventually affecting the whole community, as well as inter-community relations (*Dancing*, 144). In essence, this is the benefit of a focus on the everyday and kinship: when we enact good relations with one another, our larger organizing and organizations can start from, embody, and carry forth these relationships, instead of addressing them later as an after-thought. Indeed, kinship requires an ongoing commitment to nurturing those relations, knowing that they will be tested in different ways every single day and will require continual recommitment to ensure their health (and survival).

I have employed Treaty Eight as a geographic container to address these notions of kinship and the everyday, and have insisted that focusing on these issues can have a profound impact on political and social environments as they are currently constructed or operate in Treaty Eight territory. While this project has not devoted excessive space to the issues of treaty implementation or interpretation specifically, I argue that some of the current and persistent issues with treaty stem from an inability to address notions of kinship and the quotidian in a comprehensive and/or ethical way. Treaties, as currently constructed and interpreted, are large-scale contracts/agreements over large areas of land. Contemporary scholarship on treaties by-and-large is interested in revisiting areas of interpretation or hermeneutics, especially since it has

huge ramifications for who has access to what lands. However, in these often-revisited areas of analysis, notions of how to act and move ethically on and with these lands and with one another become omitted or minimized – the focus, instead, is on the idea of affirming or disputing treaties as land transactions. Of course, this is not to say this work is not important (we still need to be attentive to and do this work), but instead that an earnest engagement with how Indigenous peoples are going to engage with one another, non-Indigenous peoples, as well as the myriad treaties we have with other-than-human communities, should be a major focus of these treaty agreements, with the intention of having improved larger-scale relations be the end goal – after all, as Blaeser and Simpson argue above, these relations begin with the intimate and radiate outwards. This is also not to say that we need to invest in superficial engagements with treaty that too easily declare that ‘we are all treaty people’ (Epp, 2008; Ralston Saul, 2014), but rather to recognize the messy, interpersonal work we need to do in order to live together in a good way on these lands. Participating in this work in an ethical way means to recognize that in order for us all to be treaty people, then we need to radically restructure or dismantle things as they currently operate – to be more specific, we need to address how settler colonialism currently functions and structures relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

On one hand, this work should rightfully fall disproportionately at the feet of settlers. In Chapters Two and Three of this project, I have outlined how historically non-Indigenous peoples have not been anything remotely close to good kin, and have engaged in targeted erasures or have actively poisoned the lands of their treaty partners. In Chapter Three, “Nikîkîwân,” I illustrate how Cree kinship relations in my home territory have shifted over time and space in the face of harmful settler colonial policies, and how, in some cases – as in the case of my own family – the only way to maintain kinship relations is to make significant (coerced) sacrifices.

The issue here, though, is that other kinship relations are compromised in the process, as my grandmother and her parents had to temporarily suspend their kinship relations with the lands they had lived on their entire lives, only to see the same people that dispossessed them poison those lands (and the kin therein) decades later (as I outline in Chapter Four). However, this desire not to allow one's kin to be subject to the residential school system, as well as the willingness to suspend one's relational obligation to the landscape, are the sorts of movements Indigenous peoples make in order to preserve their relations in the face of overwhelming destruction to our lives and homelands.

This destruction of the land is the focus of Chapter Four, which addresses how non-Indigenous peoples dishonour their obligations to Indigenous peoples and other-than-human beings in the area of Treaty Eight, specifically the Swan Hills Valley (wherein Swan River First Nation, my community, resides). In this chapter, I not only outline the myriad violences at work on Indigenous peoples in Treaty Eight territory (symbolic, rhetorical, material, and slow violence are all at play), but I also gesture to the ways in which settlers might learn to be good kin to Indigenous people, and to Indigenous lands. This effort to become good kin may require painful or uncomfortable changes, but as I have demonstrated in previous chapters, kinship is a challenging, politicized process that requires us to act ethically with and for our relations. The simple fact is that if non-Indigenous peoples, particularly white settlers, participate in processes that harm not only Indigenous peoples, but other-than-human peoples (as well as, ultimately, white settlers themselves), then the only ethical move might be to grapple with the prospect of losing one's (white, settler) kin. As Christina Sharpe writes, white people must “[r]efuse reconciliation to ongoing brutality ... [r]efuse to feast on the corpse of others” (n.p.). With that said, I have also pointed to the way in which Indigenous peoples have (and have historically)

allowed room for the establishment or the making of kin, an action that would benefit all involved provided these kin are willing to participate in these other difficult aspects of kinship. Chapter Four is an attempt to gesture to the many registers of kinship, and how Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples can interact with one another in an ethical way in a shared geography. When this does not happen, the results are catastrophic and expand over time and space, harming relations (especially other-than-human relations, and the land itself), via varying scales of violence.

On the other hand, Indigenous peoples need to engage with one another in a good way as well, if we have any hope of modelling what good kinship can look like. These good models of kinship radiate outwards, and can be a reference point when engaging with non-Indigenous peoples or groups. One impediment to this, as I have argued in Chapter Five, has been the enforcement of harmful, rigidly imposed masculinities and the gender binary. Through the work of Cree poet and theorist Billy-Ray Belcourt, I turn a critical eye towards our own communities, and the multiple violences we enact on and against one another. If, as Belcourt writes in one of his poems, his “kookum and mooshum don’t use pronouns or proper nouns to address one another” and “they made their own language” to escape the gendered and gendering violence of language (*This Wound*, 10), then we might ask why we as communities have decided to attribute/inscribe gender categories onto our kookums and mooshums and their succeeding relations?⁵¹ These projected categories limit not only our relational obligations of the present (of

⁵¹ Kookum and mooshum loosely translate to grandmother and grandfather in Cree. That said, these are the everyday, colloquial ways of referring to one’s grandparents, as relatives in Cree are always described relationally. For example, to say “my grandmother,” one would say nôhkom, and to say “your grandmother,” one would say kôhkom (with the morphemes [n] and [k] changing here to indicate the subject’s relation to the grandparent in question). Grammatically, then, when one says “my kookum,” one is actually saying “my your grandmother.”

the “ordinary now,” as Byrd names it), but also the relations we intend or desire in and for the future. Ultimately, as Belcourt notes in his critical writing, the violent, ongoing process of “settler colonialism works up modes of being-in-the-world that narrate themselves as the only options we have” (“Poltergeist,” 24). However, in his reference to his kookum and mooshum in his poetry, Belcourt points to other modes of being that do not adhere to the strict confines or demands of these categories. This fact is corroborated through the work of other Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, who have gestured to the genealogies of being in the world that have been targeted, but ultimately not eradicated, by settler colonialism (Driskill, 2010; S. Hunt, 2018; Morgensen, 2010). In interrogating, troubling, and ultimately dismantling these violent modes of interacting with one another, writers, artists, and activists like Belcourt demonstrate how we can create space for ways of being that are not defined or delimited by the strictures of settler colonialism.

For the remainder of this conclusion, I consider the possibilities and the difficulties of engaging in this work in terms of both the field of Indigenous studies, and in terms of decolonizing our own interpersonal/inter-being relationships as Indigenous peoples. Throughout this project, I have signaled how some of the more commonly addressed topics in Indigenous studies might be reframed by decolonizing the everyday, and de-emphasizing our reliance on the inherited vocabularies of our field and of our political struggles. In the following sections, I review my three primary contributions to the field of Indigenous studies and hopefully to Indigenous communities more broadly. As part of this review I engage in reflection about some of the challenges of engaging in the kind of work I propose: first, I emphasize the difficulties

However, kookum and mooshum have gained widespread usage as ways to refer to one’s grandparents in a colloquial sense, and this usage is widely accepted/used by Cree, Métis, and Anishinaabe peoples.

involved in transforming one's everyday relations. While we might readily identify the gap between the micro and macro scales of our engagements and kinship responsibilities, there is also a need to address the gap between our stated commitments to decolonizing relations on a micro-scale, and the practice of actually doing this difficult, messy, uncomfortable work. Second, there is a need to consider how this work significantly challenges the established field of Indigenous studies, and, thus, to address the difficulties of rethinking our inherited field-imaginary. Following this, I lay the groundwork for my future research areas, and gesture to how the concepts examined in this project might be applied to ideas of urban Indigeneity, as well as the persistent kinship failures that shape settlers' reception of Indigenous literary production. Finally, I conclude with some closing thoughts and questions.

REVIEW OF PRIMARY CONTRIBUTIONS

Under its larger discussion of the importance of the everyday and kinship for Indigenous peoples, this dissertation offers three primary contributions to the field of Indigenous studies, and Indigenous literary studies specifically: one, a focus on kinship that emphasizes the interrelated processes and ethical imperatives of making/losing kin; two, everydayness as central for the field of Indigenous studies, especially as a lens through which to address persistent problems within not only the discipline but within Indigenous communities more broadly; and three, a more robust understanding and engagement with the territories of Treaty Eight, specifically the northern Cree communities that are often thought of as simply the bearers of resources extraction and development, and not thought of as knowledge-producers, artists, and poets. Below, I briefly review my contributions in relation to each of these in turn.

Losing/Making Kin

Throughout this project, I have attempted to show that losing kin and making kin are two sides of the same coin. In order to have good relations, not only between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples, but also within Indigenous communities, we may have to think of these dual processes of losing and making kin, and engage in them as worthwhile endeavours. I suggest these twin measures as a mode of “getting on” in the world, as a way of thinking through how we interact with one another in shared geographies, which is sometimes not addressed in the macropolitical projects of international agreements/treatises or treaties themselves. This suggestion comes in part from my frustration with the notion that, if we just describe a problem clearly and thoroughly enough, then eventually we will arrive at the right solution, and be able to prescribe our way toward, in this case, better relations. This presumes, first of all, that there is only one way of describing a problem, but also that problems persist primarily because of a failure of description, and thus, change will follow if we can only get the description right, and then derive a prescription that follows rationally and linearly from the diagnosis.

In actuality, there are two limits to this approach: first, no description of a problem – including the analysis offered, the concepts deployed, and the resolutions proposed – are timeless. Rather, we need to continually assess whether the analyses and concepts we deploy in Indigenous studies are adequate for asking the questions that need asking. However, the second limit is that, substituting one concept for another, while necessary work, hardly stands in for the difficult work of actually remaking our practice – i.e., in the case of this dissertation, enacting good kinship relations. It is very easy *to say* we are engaging in acts of ethical relationality, but it is much harder *to do* or actively participate in these actions. In short, what I am suggesting here is that perhaps while a focus on kinship, and the difficult, complex, and nuanced questions and

actions it demands of us, might be a generative alternative to (or a necessary step to take before, or at the very least, alongside) analyses and conceptual frames rooted in macropolitical projects such as ideas of treaty interpretation and implementation and other largescale endeavours, this “redescription” itself is only one part of the work that is required of us.

I want to be clear, however, that I do not intend to romanticize kinship (either in theory or in practice), as I have reiterated throughout this project that mending or remaking ruptured kinship relations is a complicated, messy, and laborious process, just as maintaining existing relations is hard work. Further, when I emphasize kinship as a means to fundamentally change the existing relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, I do not mean this in the superficial, liberal-democratic way that is espoused by AFN chiefs or “well-meaning” liberal politicians. To put it simply, in order for there to be good kinship relations, the world as it is currently constructed, which is to say through the edifices of settler colonialism, need not only to change, but to be dismantled and eradicated. Indeed, this may require engaging with a specifically settler colonial manifestation of what Robin DiAngelo terms “white fragility,” in which any challenge to presumed white/colonial entitlements triggers significant stress and defensiveness (55). Because (white) settlers are so used to having epistemic authority, and so unfamiliar with being challenged in their entitlements, if and when something “does directly address racism and the privileging of whites, common white responses include anger, withdrawal, emotional incapacitation, guilt, argumentation, and cognitive dissonance” (DiAngelo 55). Such a response prompts important questions about the ongoing affective and material investments in settler colonialism from settler citizens, scholars, and populations. Although some settlers may view themselves as progressive individuals invested in the decolonization efforts of Indigenous communities, such responses as the ones above suggest that some of these same

settlers are unaware (or rather, are willfully ignorant) of how their desires (for survival, for prosperity, for superiority) are shaped by settler colonialism. As Beenash Jafri makes clear, settler colonialism is “a project of desire, articulated through narratives that appear natural and innate and that sustain colonial power” (73). Settlers may feel horror at even the imagined possibility of a future without whiteness, while they simultaneously continue to live and benefit every day in the most mundane ways from a world that is premised on a future without Indigeneity.⁵² As Leey'qsun scholar Rachel Flowers writes, if “the term settler is used without a critical understanding of its meaning and the relationships embedded within it,” it exists more or less as “an empty signifier” (33). While exaggerated affective responses that often arise in response to Indigenous demands are instructive in themselves for identifying and deconstructing settler desires and subjectivities, I emphasize that it is indeed the case that for decolonization or meaningful kinship relations to take place, promised white futures do have to be reimagined - or, rather, dismantled - to the point where the structural position of the settler ceases to exist as such. This would not require the literal death of people who currently inhabit the position of settler, but the total transformation of existing relations (or we might say, non-relations) between Indigenous peoples and settlers toward something as yet unimagined that would ensure the thriving of Indigenous lands and lives. Perhaps one method of doing this would be in engaging in the acts of losing and making kin.

⁵² I am reminded here of Sharon Patricia Holland’s response when addressing reviewers reactions to Leslie Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*, and its supposed hatred of white people: “It is amazing that after centuries of marking black and brown peoples as the antithesis of the word good, we should be so frightened of turning the tables, even when that look at the underside of history provides us with some truth about the way things really are in the eyes of peoples surviving the terror brought on by the practice of genocide” (68).

When I speak of losing kin, I am not just talking about losing kin in a sense of individual relations, such as one's proverbial racist uncle for example (though I am not opposed to this), rather I am talking about abolishing (or hospicing) a white supremacist kinship structure, an entangled and component part of settler colonialism. Foregoing or dismantling whiteness as *the* organizing principle of one's kinship relations, as the glue that unites white people against the perceived threat of the racial other, is what is meant by losing one's kin, and this necessitates the end of not only white supremacy but also settler colonialism. To do this would be to engage in modes of nurturing/resurging existing Indigenous inter-relations, as well as a method of imagining as yet unimaginable kinship relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, which might have been gestured to in the original, Indigenous understandings or intentions of treaty, but which have never really existed in practice.⁵³ This practice of losing kin offers, as well, its opposite: the ability to make kin, to enter into meaningful, reciprocal relations and obligations with other peoples and other-than-human beings outside of the hierarchical structures of settler colonialism. In short, when I say "losing kin", I am not (only) talking about that practice of losing an individual (or individuals), but more substantively, losing the promise of security and superiority that is offered by whiteness as a mode of existing and relating. And while this might seem a difficult or even impossible task, it might not be so difficult if one considers what one has to gain is the whole world.

⁵³ It is worth noting that ideas of "losing kin" have a long history within different modes of Indigenous justice and legal traditions. In *Canada's Indigenous Constitution*, John Borrows (2010) articulates how exile existed as a verifiable means of distributing forms of justice in Cree, Anishinaabe, and other Indigenous communities and contexts. Similarly, Val Napoleon (2013) outlines similar procedures within Cree cosmologies and modes of governance, and how these modes of Indigenous law manifest in/through story. Finally, in Lee Maracle's novels *Ravensong* (1993) and *Celia's Song* (2014), Indigenous forms of justice are also exhibited in a Coast Salish, specifically Stó:lo, context and one of those forms of administered justice is exile (a form of losing of one's kin, including the specific geographies or lands of a community).

Centering the Everyday in Indigenous Studies

In “Meditations on Reserve Life, Biosociality, and the taste of non-sovereignty,” Billy-Ray Belcourt asks: “What does it mean to politically commit to a place that wears you down in order to maintain an allegiance to indigeneity’s visible cultural forms? Is this all some of us have left?” (3). In Chapter Four, I examined the Swan Hills Waste Treatment Centre and the toxicity that the often-neglected site exposed Indigenous communities to in the area, including my community of Swan River and Billy-Ray Belcourt’s community of Driftpile Cree Nation. What I want to illustrate through the application of Everyday Life theory to Indigenous studies is the complicating of Indigeneity’s “visible cultural forms,” to parse out some of the dominating themes of Indigenous studies and how they potentially support or harm Indigenous peoples and communities. For instance, in the case of the Swan Hills Waste Treatment Centre, by considering how many of our lands have been poisoned, we may be compelled to complicate our notions of “going back to the land” or “land-based practices.” While I agree that land-based practices are indeed an important part of Indigenous communities and Indigenous peoples’ lives, I think we also need to be aware of how different Indigenous communities are exposed to toxins within their home territories, and therefore the ways in which they engage in land-based practices may not resemble the theories or practices articulated by “man-on-the-land” scholars and activists. Furthermore, in Chapter Five I attempted to show how some ways of framing land-based practices give rise to forms of masculinity that are also toxic, and how emphasizing these particular visible cultural forms risks negating or eliminating other modes of being Indigenous.

Ultimately, what I am arguing for is not the willful ignorance of macropolitical issues of Indigenous life, but rather, in some cases, I am calling for their willful suspension, so we can address some of the other issues affecting our communities, both inside and outside of the

discipline of Indigenous (literary) studies. Writing about the familiar scripts we enter into in our efforts to diagnose and resist the problems brought forth by modernity, Black studies scholar David Scott insists that we ask if “our concepts are adequate to the present, whether they can be reappropriated through a refigured semantic content, or whether they ought to be abandoned altogether” (5-6). Scott continues that “the demand we face in the present we inhabit is for an historicization of the categories that have constituted the idiom of our political criticism” (12). Belcourt has referred to the dogged insistence on particular forms of intelligible Indigeneity as a form of “cruel nostalgia,” which, following Berlant, means to hold on to or desire the very things that are causing one harm. Belcourt writes, “these forms of nostalgia are actually detrimental to us, that this relation to time and temporality atrophies Indigenous social worlds insofar as it forecloses queer, trans possibility. We can’t romanticize and invest so much in the past when the horizon of possibility ahead is always widening” (qtd. in Johns, n.p.). The project, for Belcourt, is “how to think about living differently without resorting to a kind of cruel nostalgia” (“Can the Other,” n.p.). Scott echoes this sentiment when he writes that “it seemed to me that very little systematic consideration, if any, was being given to *what* present it is that the past is being reimagined *for*” (2). What both Scott’s and Belcourt’s insights make evident is a pressing need to identify and denaturalize the driving questions, concepts and concerns that orient the Indigenous studies field. My desire to undertake this work is not driven by the intention of summarily dismissing these questions/concepts/concerns, but rather of interrogating them; that is, asking why, when, and where they emerged, and what strategic purpose they served; asking what possibilities and forms of life they currently enable, and for whom, and what they foreclose, and thus, considering whether they are adequate for us to face the problems of the present; and

asking what other questions, concepts and concerns might orient our work and enable other possible worlds than the one we currently inhabit.

Engaging Treaty Eight Otherwise

In an interview with CiTR's *Unceded Airwaves*, an interviewer asked Billy-Ray Belcourt "Why do[es] he think there are so few poets in Treaty Eight?" In response, Belcourt agreed that he often thinks of "how there are so few poets who come out of Treaty Eight, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous," and that he "think[s] it has to do with the absence of creative communities up north, that there is such a scramble for resources and a scarcity of resources, that funding is syphoned into places like primary and secondary education, to the few non-profits that are up [north], so there aren't a whole lot of opportunities for artistic production and the teaching of it ... [and] that art is not necessarily an integral part of public life in the north" (Schnell, n.p.).

Belcourt is careful to mention that this non-occupation with art or poetry has to do with the basic necessity of survival in Northern Alberta, not only in relation to the often harsh climates, but also problems having to do with isolation, poverty, and inter-community issues. And although I understand that life (or simply survival) in Northern Alberta is incredibly difficult – a fact I know intimately – I cannot help but think, and ultimately stress, that we may need to look harder or reconceptualize what we think of as artistic production in Northern Alberta.

Belcourt's comments offer an interesting opening into a larger conversation about how people (especially settlers) continually conceptualize the peoples of Treaty Eight (though this can also apply to how people think of Indigenous peoples more generally as well) as non-artistic or as only capable of producing primitive or quaint cultural artefacts. This project has been an attempt to show how the Cree communities of Treaty Eight territories are brimming with artistic,

intellectual, and cultural production, and that we need to recognize it in its various forms. To put it another way, my great-grandmother is a superhero, my kôhkum is a genius, and the Indigenous community members protesting resource extraction and development in their territories are theorists and poets. While the territories of Treaty Eight, especially those located in proximity to the tar sands, are often thought of as continually having to remain vigilant to protect their lands and bodies from resource extraction and production and thus have little time for thought, or sometimes these areas are conceived of as depopulated entirely (after all, how could people survive in those conditions?), I want to stress that they also find time to laugh and create, to write and read. A primary motivation for this project was to show these aspects of Treaty Eight, to show instances of history and story-telling, of activism and critical theorizing, and of poetry and creative writing (as exemplified by not only Billy-Ray Belcourt's exquisite poetry, but also by other community members who may write in their free time for themselves or who may see little publication opportunities). Treaty Eight is a vibrant area, and the Cree communities in Northern Alberta are critical thinkers and generative doers, and the preceding chapters have attempted to show these aspects in all their dynamic nuance and complexity.

FUTURE PROJECTS

In grappling with the issues and questions outlined in this project, I have begun to create a critical vocabulary and archive to address some other areas of interest that I intend to engage with in my future work. In this section, I describe two topics I will investigate and write further about in my academic studies. This offers me an opportunity to outline my future research agenda, but more importantly for the purposes of this dissertation, it further illustrates the

potential generativity of the conceptual interventions that I have begun to develop for the field of Indigenous studies more generally, and for Indigenous literary studies specifically.

Urban Indigeneity

One of my projects will address urban Indigeneity within Indigenous literary studies in a way that expands beyond common readings centred around questions of authenticity or identity. In no way do I disparage those readings, but I find that “the urban” as a concept and as “a geography” is a generative site and lens through which to look at everything from Indigenous nationhood/peoplehood, land-based practices, governance, gender, kinship, among many other things. I intend to construct an archive of texts that not only locates these issues in Indigenous literary texts (novels, plays, poems), but also catalogues them within settler literary criticism on urban Indigeneity, to trace out persistent tropes, clichés, and (mis)representations. Mostly, what I am interested in is the way in which literary studies (specifically Canadian literature and U.S. literature) almost always approaches urban Indigeneity from a starting point of lack, with protagonists or speakers who are constantly obsessed with questions of authenticity (even if it is only to trouble these parameters).

Craig Womack, in *Reasoning Together*, narrows concerns with authenticity down to the proliferation of “narratives of return,” or the “‘homecoming’ impulse” (16), present in a multitude of influential Indigenous texts, and taken up by literary criticism on Indigenous peoples at the expense of more complex historicized and political analyses. For Womack, the texts and authors of the “Native American Literary Renaissance” can be read as homecoming impulse narratives, but that is not *all* that they are; however, the texts generally prompted criticism that would continually engage them in this way, and specifically through the narrow

lens of authenticity or identity. A few examples of these influential texts include: Leslie Silko's *Ceremony*, M. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, and in a Canadian context, Richard Wagamese's *Keeper n' Me*. Womack suggests that interpreting these novels primarily through this homecoming impulse results in readings that depict these narratives as stories of Indigenous peoples being "stuck between two worlds" (*Red on Red*, 139), and they depict characters struggling to rectify living in "the western world" and "an Indigenous world." The readings of these texts within mainstream literary criticism are almost always preoccupied with notions of authenticity (among other things), and usually cast the urban as a site of or locus of disruption/incoherence around "authentic Indigenous identity." Writing more about the "stuck between two worlds" motif, Womack notes that this type of thinking is "root[ed] in the tragic Indian notions of the early part of [the Twentieth] century, the half-breed torn between cultures, and all of the either/or assumptions that go along with this type of thinking" (140). Womack continues, "Someone even more cynical might try to point out that the bicultural arguments work out nicely for white critics who, by deconstructing insider/outsider status, can carve out a huge place for themselves in Native literary studies" (141). This carving out by white critics, I think, is a primary problem with literary studies' engagements with urban Indigeneity, since it recasts these issues of authenticity as *the* issues within Indigenous literary studies, instead of reading an urban Indigenous community/nation/geography as "a real, viable, ongoing political entity," as an entity that still participates in Indigenous ways of being in the world in urban environments (with land-based practices being just one example) (Womack, *Red on Red*, 141).

The issue with whitestream literary studies' engagement with Indigenous studies (that is to say, one issue of many), is that many literary scholars appear not to read Indigenous critics or theorists in a substantive, contextualized way – which is to say, they do not engage with

Indigenous thought(s), practices, and worldviews, including but not limited to the academic field of Indigenous studies. While I know that literary and other scholars do indeed read Indigenous texts, and increasingly so in the present era of reconciliation and in a moment during which the Canadian literature establishment has been very publicly called to account for its enduring whiteness, the questions that arise from these texts in relation to urban Indigeneity almost always orbit around notions of authenticity or cultural authority, instead of engaging with the breadth that these texts (may) have to offer. Put simply, I am less interested in whether one *is* Indigenous or what it *means to be* Indigenous, and rather I am more interested in what one *does* when they are Indigenous and have obligations to communities in urban environments and beyond.

Renya Ramirez (2007) refers to the diversity and complexity of urban Indigenous experience(s) as the manifestation of urban “native hubs.” An urban native hub, to Ramirez, is a “a collecting center, a hub of Indian peoples’ new ideas, information, culture, community, and imagination that when shared back ‘home’ on the reservation can impact thousands of Native Americans” (2). Providing a description that has several resonances with ‘native hubs,’ Leanne Simpson explains that in Anishinaabemowin, the word for city translates to “the place where the hearts gather” (*Dancing*, 94). Elaborating further and supplying a nation-specific reading of the urban, Simpson writes: “I thought about how Odemin Giizis is June, or the moon when the heart berries (strawberries) are ready. I pictured those odeminanm, or heart berries, and their runners connecting the plants in a web of inter-relationships, much like cities” (*Dancing*, 94). Urban native hubs, then, are acts of resurgence; they are urban tactics that disrupt the colonial ordering and confinement of Indigenous bodies to particular spaces and challenge the predominant representations of where and how Indigenous peoples can live and thrive. Therefore, “[t]he beauty of culturally inherent resurgence,” Simpson writes, “is that it challenges settler colonial

dissections of our territories and our bodies into reserve/city or rural/urban dichotomies” (“Land as Pedagogy,” 23).

Indeed, the demarcation of different geographical areas as hospitable to Indigenous presence and habituation (or not) elides the fact that “[a]ll Canadian cities are on Indigenous lands,” and, as such, are subject to the various ways in which Indigenous peoples decide to reinscribe their active presence in these spaces (“Land as Pedagogy,” 23). As Matthew Snipp notes, when “taking a long view of history, American Indians [...] have lived in urban areas since before the time of Columbus” (174). What would it mean if the “return narratives” so prevalent in Indigenous texts were reversed? What if, contrary to the massive amounts of literature proclaiming them to be strangers, Indigenous peoples were exactly the opposite in urban spaces (Woodsworth, 1909; Krotz, 1980; Newhouse and Peters, 2003)? As Jay T. Johnson indicates, the “urbanization of First Nations people over the last several decades is, in some ways, merely a reclaiming of our rightful place within urban centres” (219).

My intervention, then, is to move beyond facile images of urban Indigenous peoples that are predominantly preoccupied with ideas of authenticity or cultural degradation or deficiency (which, again, is not to say this work is unimportant; rather that a lot of work has already been done in this area and continues to be, in spite of other, perhaps more interesting avenues being available), but rather to provide a more nuanced view of urban Indigenous political and social life in urban environments.⁵⁴ These more nuanced views not only exist in capital “L,” Indigenous

⁵⁴ I have begun this project in earnest, with an upcoming chapter coming out in the newest edition of *Visions Of The Heart: Canadian Aboriginal Issues* (Oxford UP, forthcoming). While I do not have the space to rehearse the entire argument of that chapter here, I will provide a brief description of it to gesture to the interventions I hope to make. Instead of providing a reading of urban Indigeneity rooted in deficiency or preoccupied with notions of authenticity, I look to Leanne Simpson’s short story “Plight,” from her collection *This Accident of Being Lost* (2017), to demonstrate how narratives of urban Indigeneity can focus on land-based practices and other issues affecting, or of

Literature, but they are also available in a variety of other print cultures that literary studies purportedly engages with, but does not seem to really read in any critical or retentive capacity.

Ultimately, this project raises the following questions for further consideration and conversation, rather than in an attempt to answer them all in any kind of satisfactory way: why do literary engagements with Indigenous studies and Indigenous peoples continue to perpetuate the same tired tropes and questions about urban Indigenous peoples, primarily that the issues affecting Indigenous peoples are ones of cultural alienation or issues of authenticity? What other issues are elided or neglected when cultural alienation becomes a focal point or the point of emphasis? How can we simultaneously attend to issues of cultural alienation and material issues facing Indigenous communities, such as land disputes and jurisdictional issues? Can settler scholars only conceive of Indigenous peoples within these very limited frames and only when they adhere to narrow scripts that allow for limited representations? Does the preoccupation with damage-centered research foreclose on the ability for literary scholars to read texts on urban Indigeneity in other, more generative ways? What might these more expansive readings of Indigenous literature offer to Indigenous communities? How can we support the production and circulation of diverse narratives and literary forms within Indigenous literatures, especially given the colonial political economy of literary production? How might it be possible to interrupt the

interest to, Indigenous communities in city spaces. In the short story, the speaker and several other characters make syrup in an urban environment, with Simpson more or less providing a “how-to guide” for others should they desire to make syrup as well. In this way, Simpson’s text is pedagogical as it demonstrates how to make syrup in city spaces (going so far as to describe the tools needed and the amount of time necessary for each step in the process), and does not foreclose on the ability for Indigenous peoples to flourish in urban environments. Simpson’s text is just one of many that engages with the urban in a way that does not foreground issues having to do solely with “authenticity.”

settler desire for damage-centred literary narratives, and how can the labour of this interruption be distributed in a way that does not simply reproduce colonial relations?

Benevolent Elision

In a project tentatively titled, “Benevolent Elision: Narratives of Incorporation, Settler Replacement, and Indigenous Resistance,” I intend to construct a book-length manuscript around three articles I have published or that are in different stages of publication, and which are all united around a common theme. By employing the phrase “benevolent elision,” I address and illustrate how various colonial texts and practices attempt to incorporate select Indigenous knowledges/histories/individuals, but in ways that ultimately exclude and undermine the collective well-being of Indigenous communities, knowledge systems, and stories. These patterns obfuscate colonial practices by “benevolently” including Indigenous individuals, while systemic practices of colonial erasure and elimination continue to operate at the communal level, severing relations between Indigenous peoples, Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, and Indigenous kinship relations with other-than-human kin. As Dian Million makes clear, settlers “are attached affectively to pitying/adoring/hating/loving Indians, but do not seek to know them, particularly if they cannot figure out how to consume them” (84). Benevolent elision, then, is a form of colonial consumption that demands nothing of the settler, and instead, ensures their continued settlement by perpetuating the ruse that nation-states like Canada are accommodating, liberal, democratic entities invested in idea(l)s of multiculturalism and purported plurality. At the same time, this benevolent project naturalizes liberal multiculturalism as the only possible horizon of justice and transformation, eliding other possibilities that cannot be contained within the narrow forms of existence permitted by the colonial nation-state. While my work addresses

the brutal, totalizing drive of settler colonialism (i.e., the complete, attempted vanishing of Indigenous peoples), benevolent elision in particular is concerned with the more insidious, conciliatory ways that Canada, and its many appendages, engage in erasure. These “benevolent” processes, ultimately, seek to foreclose on Indigenous futures and futurities, and ensure the continuation of settler futurities, even as Indigenous peoples resist this outcome.

Benevolent elision operates through the construction of collective settler memory, governmental policy, and popular media, amongst other things. I develop this concept in conversation with Sara Ahmed’s (2012) work on conditional inclusion within dominant institutions, and Glen Coulthard’s (2014) work on liberal, democratic forms of recognition, but also in conversation with scholarship on archival studies, media studies, kinship criticism, literary criticism, and futurity studies (consulting both Indigenous and Afro futurities). While I will be using “benevolent elision” in a thematic way to unify three distinct published works, I will also be incorporating ideas of kinship and geography as well, since I will have a critical vocabulary to draw on following the completion of my dissertation project. My methodology will be inspired by Jodi Byrd’s *Transit of Empire* (2011), which traces “Indianness” through a variety of divergent literary and theoretical texts, historical events and memories, and entangled geographies, generating insight from apparent cacophony, and unraveling colonialism’s uneven effects in order to open up new possibilities for alliance, relationality, and resistance.

Although various, divergent media will be analyzed, the project will have a coherent internal logic in both a temporal and spatial sense. While I recognize the possible limitations of proceeding too linearly, the structure of the project will ultimately proceed in a linear fashion: an historical archive of the concept in settler literatures and popular culture, followed by an examination of a contemporary issue similar to the Swan Hills Waste Treatment Centre explored

in Chapter Four of this project, and finally, into “the future” with Indigenous futurities (represented through film and popular literature). Of course, all of these issues are imbricated and implicated in other temporalities, but it is my hope that the linear progression provides a bit of a framework and serves as a guide through the variety of media examined. By consulting various texts, including popular culture, this project will continue the efforts in this dissertation to illuminate the everydayness of settler colonialism (its quotidian machinations), as well as resistance to it, while addressing how the broader structures of settler colonialism do indeed set up the scaffolding of benevolent elision for colonial regimes (whether that is through direct violence, harmful policies, or narratives that naturalize settler replacement). I am interested in how this scaffolding allows for everyday, iterative acts that shore up settler legitimacy or claims to spaces. These daily acts, whether they are as small as absences in archival records, to a well-organized silence around destructive environmental policies surrounding a “small” tract of land, sediment over time — they become reified not only within the broader narrative of Canada and its settler colonial apparatuses, but also in the imaginaries of its citizens.

FINAL INSIGHTS / QUESTIONS

Although this project has been preoccupied with the politics of the everyday, I also insist that we have to be attentive to larger, macropolitical movements involving our communities. Indeed, at various points throughout this chapter and the chapters preceding, I have attempted to illustrate that micro- and macropolitical movements are deeply entangled, with each informing the other. However, the everyday is routinely dismissed as a frivolous or superfluous site of analysis, and immaterial to the larger collective projects in which we *should* be engaging. This dismissal tends to label the important work engaged in by Indigenous youth, women, queer, and

Two Spirit peoples as inconsequential, or it is neglected as a worthwhile area of intervention and organizing entirely. In response to these charges, I emphasize, following Hunt and Holmes, that we need to mobilize an approach that “embrace[s] a ‘both/and’ conceptual and political stance for understanding contexts, spaces, identities, and multiple forms of interlocking oppressions and violence as a way of resisting the ‘either/or’ dichotomous thinking of colonial Euro-Western paradigms” (160). Tiffany Lethabo King (2016) refers to these Euro-Western paradigms as “North American quotidian circulations of colonialist common sense” (2). Here I want to stress that we can embrace a politics of the everyday and the avenues they unlock, as well as the potential problems they pose, without having to forego or foreclose on the broader horizons of our politics – in short, we can be attentive to both. With that said, I also insist that the quotidian is a generative space for conceiving of alternatives, of reimagining our politics, and for reconfiguring the (possibly limited) horizons of our politics currently in place or deemed worthy of striving towards. An earnest engagement with the everyday and the micropolitical may enable us to imagine or dream of alternative goals or ambitions for our communities, ones that crucially should be conceived of by Indigenous women, girls, queer, and Two Spirit peoples.

Kinship, too, exceeds the bounds of these “either/or” dichotomies, in ways that are complicated yet generative. As I have outlined in the introduction, and in succeeding chapters, kinship can be a fraught, contentious process of making and sustaining relations. However, just as we can “make kin,” there is also the possibility (or necessity) of losing kin as well. And yet, this is not an either/or process, as one can possibly do both (make kin and lose them), while simultaneously thinking of the larger effects these relational projects can have. If, as Christina Sharpe writes, “[k]inship relations structure the nation,” then we need to do the “and” work of resisting “[c]apitulation to their current configurations” and the horizons they (pr)offer (n.p.).

Indeed, if our kinship obligations structure a community/nation that instantiates and maintains violent relations (imposed/toxic masculinity being one example of relating investigated in this project), then we may need to remake our kinship relations, and in the process, “[r]emake the world” (Sharpe n.p.). These are the issues influencing and affecting our contemporary manifestations of kinship relations and how we engage with one another in an (un)ethical way in the world (or in a world to come).

While this project has not delved into the history or possible implementation of Treaty Eight in extensive detail, it is worth thinking about how treaty can be read through the lens of “both/and” as well. On its surface, this might mean simply arguing for the fulfillment of Indigenous treaty rights through everyday mechanisms, while simultaneously envisioning what an ethical, widescale implementation or enacting of treaty might look like. Indeed, I have made the argument that in order for kinship relations to flourish, then a reconceptualization of what we mean by treaty relations in the everyday is necessary. The path to this reconceptualization would necessitate the complete transformation of the relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples as they currently operate. Here I am not suggesting the oft-recommended interpretation of what a phrase like this might entail (an altered set of relations within or under the Canadian state), but rather that this fundamental shift in relations can only come by way of dismantling the current settler colonial structure of the state and its mechanisms, appendages, and apparatuses entirely. With the Canadian nation-state unchanged, then it stands to reason that kinship and treaty relations will remain unchanged as well, which is to say that they will be unilaterally dictated by the Canadian government and its citizens. For proof of this, one need look no further than the Canadian government (under the leadership of Justin Trudeau) continually seeking to construct the KML pipeline in favour of the so-called “national interest” and against the wishes

of Indigenous communities. The Canadian national interest constantly comes into conflict with the interests of Indigenous communities and nations – i.e., Canada’s treaty partners – and my nation of Swan River has already opposed the construction of the pipeline not only for fears of what it will do to the environment now, but also out of concern for what its long-term, proliferating effects will be as well (“Treaty Alliance,” n.p.). As Belcourt notes, “Justin Trudeau’s is a national culture of sentiment that buries his and previous Canadas’ complicities in decades-long biological warfare against Indigenous life” (“Meditations,” 3). These resource development/extraction projects not only have devastating impacts on the creation of meaningful relations (both in a treaty and kinship sense), but they also have dire ramifications on the daily lives of Indigenous peoples who are expected to (willingly) absorb the pollution of these extraction efforts if there are any major spills. Indigenous communities, however, are also aware that ecologically catastrophic projects such as these push us all towards widespread environmental degradation, and acting as good relations, they regularly resist them to save their current kin (both human and other-than-human) and future kin (whether through making kin or descendants).

Ultimately, I have intended this project to be a love letter and a grief song, a celebration and a manifesto to and for home, an engagement with the complicated histories I grew up in and around, as well as the contemporary conditions currently affecting my community and other Cree communities in Treaty Eight. This project is an attempt at being good kin, both to the communities I am currently attached and accountable to, but also to communities and kin to come. While I have critiqued some kin I have in Treaty Eight for their perpetuation of harmful, toxic, masculinist practices, I intend these to be gentle critiques, but ones I nonetheless insist must be made with the perpetrators of violence held to account by members of the community.

This dissertation (or at least my experience of it) has been a long, lonely, alienating process, one that I could not accomplish without the sustained encouragement of my family and nation, and the unconditional support they have provided. They, too, have been good kin, and have taken care of me in ways that revel in the everyday: phone calls from tired but encouraging kohkums; filled-to-the-brim-with-food Tupperware containers from helpful aunties; and text messages from nikâwiy filled with moments of intense laughter and concern.⁵⁵

In this way, then, this project has been performative, in that its condition of possibility is through the very things it discusses: everyday kinship with my relations in Treaty Eight. And while this might appear to be an intensely personal project, with the possibility of having no applicability outside of its immediate context, it is my hope that it will be of some use not only to my community, but also to Indigenous peoples and communities more broadly. In short, it is my hope that it will extend a hand to my kin in other geographies and from different communities, and in so doing, make new kin in the process, across time and space.

⁵⁵ “Nikâwiy” means “my mother” in Cree.

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