OKWIRE'SHON:'A, THE FIRST STORYTELLERS:
RECOVERING LANDED CONSCIOUSNESS IN READINGS OF TREES & TEXTS

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A WELCOMING

You are welcome here, reader. Welcome into the world that has woven meaning in my mind, welcome into the stories that are me. Welcome to continue the conversation long after the last pages are read. I hope what I offer here is of value to you, that it lifts you up a little and puts something good in your mind and in your heart. I hope that what grows from this work will be of real use in some way. Perhaps it will make you think twice about that tree in your front yard, or the table that you eat upon, or the pages of this dissertation. Maybe it will just be a good story, and that is important, too.

LAY ABSTRACT

This project demonstrates a cyclical process of reading between a small selection of contemporary Indigenous literatures, Indigenous oral histories and cosmologies, and a series of trees indigenous to Turtle Island. Tree-readings are attempted through three methods: aesthetic (metaphoric) interpretation; analysis through Indigenous oral histories; and, listening to the thoughts of the trees themselves. Each tree's teachings are then bundled together as a framework for reading a work of Indigenous narrative art that demonstrates similar principles and emphases. The overall aim of this work is to model how landed processes of coming to know develop an awareness of the land and all nonhuman societies as alive, thinking, and possessing agency. In a Rotinonhsonni (Six Nations) context, this renewal of landed consciousness strengthens the principles of righteousness, reason, and power, which sustain the Kayanerekowa (Great Law of Peace).

ABSTRACT

Okwire'shon:'a, or trees of the forest, guide the methodology and epistemology of my doctoral research. The Rotinonhsonni creation history tells us that all life is made from the clay of the earth (Mother Earth or First Woman), and therefore everything in Creation shares an origin in and a connection to the earth. Thus, Rotinonhsonni thoughtways understand trees to be part of an interconnected network of land-based knowledge that spans from time immemorial to the present. As extensions of First Woman, trees are literally my relations, my ancestors. While *onkwehonwe* (original peoples) have long been able to tap into the knowledge of the land (and many still do), colonialism has significantly disrupted our landed and place-based relationships and consequently our ability to read the land. This, in turn, disrupts the ability of *onkwehonwe* to live within the principles of Kayanerekowa. My dissertation explores, through juxtapositions of Rotinonhsonni oral histories, contemporary Indigenous literature, and a series of trees, the possibility of (re)learning to read and communicate with the land. Using a trans-Indigenous methodology, my project examines three branches of land-centered philosophy within Indigenous literature: enacting creation stories; spirit agency; and internalized ecological holism. By reading different Indigenous texts across from Rotinonhsonni epic teachings, my trans-Indigenous methodology affirms Indigenous alliances with the environment and with each other, their long-standing presence on and stewardship of the land, and the value and validity of knowledge that is ancestral, adaptive, and alive. I argue that by carrying forward land-centered knowledge contemporary Indigenous literature stimulates an awareness of the land and nonhuman societies as cognizant and in communication with us. Renewing relations and modes of relationality to the land in this way re-energizes Kayanerekowa, and has the potential to

strengthen Indigenous efforts for self-determination, knowledge resurgence, land reclamation, and nation-to-nation alliances.

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To Tobin and Wren: Tobin, you once told me that the purpose of life is to shine through your actions and that if you can bring that light to just one other person in this world so they light up too, then you’ve lived a good life. Your light shines in these pages, as it shines in me, and in our beautiful daughter. Wren, thank you so much for choosing us as your parents. I’ve had no greater honour in life than to be your mom.

This work began with a love of trees and stories. I am endlessly grateful to my mother and father for doing such a good job of introducing me to Creation from the very first. They brought me to the forests, taught me to swim in the waters, to dig in the mud and sand, and to love and respect everything from the smallest insect to the thunderers in the sky. Nya’wen to you both for teaching me how to be of good mind.

This is for you, Dad.

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Taiethinonhwera:ton ne onkwe'shon:'a. E'tho kati neniohtonhake ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

We greet each other, giving love and respect to all people. This is how our minds are to be.

Taiethinonhwera:ton ne iethi'nihstenha tsiohwentsia:te. E'tho kati neniohtonhake ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

To our mother the earth we give greetings, love and respect. This is how our minds are to be.

Taiethinonhwera:ton ne iothonton:ni. Kano:ta ne:'e konwatikowa:nen. E'tho kati neniohtonhake ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

To the wild plants we give greetings, love and respect. The ginseng plant is the leader. This is how our minds are to be.

Taiethinonhwera:ton ne wahianiiontha. Niiohontehsha ne:'e konwatikowa:nen. E'tho kati neniohtonhake ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

To the berries we give greetings, love and respect. The strawberry plant is the leader. This is how our minds are to be.

Taiethinonhwera:ton ne kahrharonnion. Ohwahtha ne:'e konwatikowa:nen. E'tho kati neniohtonhake ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

To the forests we give greetings, love and respect. The maple tree is the leader. This is how our minds are to be.

Taiethinonhwera:ton ne kontirio. Oskenon:ton ne:'e konwatikowa:nen. E'tho kati neniohtonhake ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

To the game animals we give greetings, love and respect. The deer is the leader. This is how our minds are to be.

Taiethinonhwera:ton ne kahnekaronnion. Kaniatarake:ron ne:'e konwatikowa:nen. E'tho kati neniohtonhake ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

To the waters everywhere we give greetings, love and respect. The lakes are the leaders. This is how our minds are to be.

Taiethinonhwera:ton ne tionhehkwen. O:nenhste, ohsahe:ta tahnon onon'onsera ne:'e konwatikowa:nen. E'tho kati neniohtonhake ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

To our sustenance we give greetings, love and respect. The corn, beans and squash are the leaders. This is how our minds are to be.

Taiethinonhwera:ton ne teiowerawenrie. E'tho kati neniohtonhake ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

To the winds we give greetings, love and respect. This is how our minds are to be.

Taiethinonhwera:ton ne iethisotho:kon ratiwe:ras. E'tho kati neniohtonhake ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

To the grandfathers the thunderers we give greetings, love and respect. This is how our minds are to be.

Tatshitewatenonhwera:ton ne etshitewahtsi:'a entiehke:ne karahkwa. E'tho kati neniohtonhake ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

To our elder brother the sun we give greetings, love and respect. This is how our minds are to be.

Taiethinonhwera:ton ne iethihsotha ahsonthennehkha wenhni:tare. E'tho kati neniohtonhake ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

To our grandmother the moon we give greetings, love and respect. This is how our minds are to be.

Taiethinonhwera:ton ne iotsistohkwaronnion. E'tho kati neniohtonhake ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

To the stars we give greetings, love and respect. This is how our minds are to be.

Tatshitewatenonhwera:ton ne Skaniatari:io. E'tho kati neniohtonhake ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

To Handsome Lake we give greetings, love and respect. This is how our minds are to be.

Taiethinonhwera:ton ne ratironhia'kehro:non teionkhiia:taton. E'tho kati neniohtonhake ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

To our guardians we give greetings, love and respect. This is how our minds are to be.

Tatshitewatenonhwera:ton ne Shonkwaia'tishon. E'tho kati neniohtonhake ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

To our Creator we give greetings, love and respect. This is how our minds are to be.

Introduction

Reading Trees, Reading Texts: A Call to Landed Consciousness

Each human is a complex, contradictory story. Some
stories within us have been unfolding for years, others
are trembling with fresh life as they peek above the
horizon. Each is a zigzag of emotional design and
ancestral architecture. All the stories in the earth's
mind are connected.
~ Joy Harjo, Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings

In the summers of my infancy my mother rocked me to sleep every night under boughs of red and white pine on the banks of Pog Lake in traditional Anishinaabe territory, now known as eastern Ontario. My mother tells me that she knew even from a young age that I had a strong empathy and love for nature.

"I knew it from the way you cried over fallen trees," she tells me. "It was impossible to take you for a walk because every time you saw a log or a stump you would burst into tears and cry, 'poor broken tree!' We couldn't move on until you had given the tree a hug, and there were a lot of broken trees."

As my mother tells it, she struggled over the right thing to do to help me. She wanted to ease the suffering that I was clearly experiencing, so she told me that trees are different from human beings, that they don't feel pain. She tried to explain the cycle of life, telling me that when trees fall and break they go back to the earth and become new trees. It hurt me, feeling heartbroken for every fallen tree, and so I made a choice to believe what my mother told me, that trees aren't like humans. But I knew in my heart that this wasn't true. Trees are like people, and we are like them.

In fact, this affinity between trees and people appears in the *Kayanerekowa*, the Great Law of Peace, which first established the Confederacy Council of my people, the Rotinonhsonni ("we build the house together"). The *Rotinonshón:ni Teiotiokwaonháston* ("it circles the people"; Circle Wampum), which dates back to the founding of the Confederacy in the twelfth century, is a large circular wampum with a perimeter made of "two wampum strings wrapped together (which represent the Great Peace established amongst the nations) and attached to this circle are 50 strings (which represent each of the original fifty Hodiyanehso belonging to the Hodinohso:ni: Confederacy)" (Jacobs 11).[1] Each strand within the circle represents the name of a confederacy leader, and each leader is selected by a clan mother who has the power to "raise up" men of the good, or "dehorn" any chief who no longer acts for the good of the people. As Onöñda'gega' (Onondaga) scholar Theresa McCarthy explains:

> The wampum also reflects the spatial arrangement of the nations and the chiefs in confederacy council. The chiefs are to understand themselves as 'trees of equal height' meaning no one is superior to another. They are bound together by the intertwining strands that make up the circle, representing the "Unity of the Law of Peace." Within the circle are the things we hold sacred: our languages, culture, beliefs, and rights. The people within the circle are to be of one mind and heart. (92)

This tree-centred metaphoric language of *rotiyaner* as "trees of equal height" repeats in references to "raising up" a new chief, and in one of the most significant symbols of the *Kayanerekowa*: the Tree of Peace.

[1] *Hodiyanehso* translates to, "men who are of the good" and refers to those "chiefs" or leaders who represent the people on the Confederacy Council. The word *royaner*, meaning "he makes a good path for the people to follow" and its plural, *rotiyaner*, is also used in the same context.

In the centre of the Circle Wampum is *Tsioneratasekowa*, the Great White Pine Tree of Peace, under which the Peacemaker had all the five nations of the newly founded Rotinonhsonni bury their weapons of war in a final confirmation of their unity beneath the boughs of everlasting peace. *Tsioneratasekowa*, whose bundles of five needles reflect the original five nations of the Confederacy, exemplifies how Rotinonhsonni ideologies are often based upon relationships to the natural world. Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk) scholar Rick Monture explains the significance of natural symbols (such as the white pine) within Rotinonhsonni tradition, as they reaffirm our ceremonies, epistemologies, and lifeways as directly tied to the land and to place, and convey such in an effective and accessible manner to both mainstream populations and new generations of Rotinonhsonni:

> A 'great tree of peace' is a significant symbol and metaphor to the Haudenosaunee, but it is also an 'ordinary' white pine found throughout the northeastern United States. As such, anyone can observe it and understand that it is tall and strong and that humans can find shelter underneath it while its roots grow deep in the earth in all directions. This is the potential effectiveness of using images found within nature to enlighten, since they are visible objects that people can understand regardless of what language they speak. But too often, the European mind will stop at these associations and will be unable to see the white pine tree as anything but an inanimate object that, while perhaps beautiful and awe-inspiring, has no meaning as a metaphor of political structure or of anything useful in their everyday lives. (20)

The Peacemaker, and later messengers such as Skaniatariio (Handsome Lake), were sent to the *onkwehonwe* ("original/real people") in times of forgetting to help them remember their spiritual relationship with the earth, and to "see that relationships found in the natural world could

become activated in the human world as means of social and political thought" (Monture 21). Increasingly, I hear people say that we are currently in another time of forgetting. As I understand it, they refer to the original instructions Shonkwaia'tishon (Creator) gave to the *onkwehonwe* in order that they live in harmony with the world he created. To be in a time of forgetting means that these instructions – to treat all like one family, to give thanks for what is provided, and to tell children the stories about why things are the way they are – are not being followed. In a time of forgetting, *Tsioneratasekowa* might just be a white pine tree, rather than a spiritual being with agency who teaches and protects the principles of *Kayanerekowa*: peace, power, and righteousness. It is my hope that this dissertation – a project that juxtaposes readings of trees, Indigenous oral histories, and contemporary Indigenous literature – will act as a reminder, a reaffirmation, or an introduction to the intelligence of the earth and processes of coming to know her, and know through her. Reading between trees and texts calls attention to the ongoing, important role of Indigenous stories – including epic narratives, cosmologies, histories, personal stories, literatures, songs, traditional speeches, and storied landscapes, for example – in fostering landed consciousness and in so doing, sustaining Indigenous thought- and life-ways.

Because of the many displacements (*e.g.* spiritual, geographic, epistemological, socio-political) wrought by settler colonialism and capitalism, many *onkwehonwe* (including myself), struggle to remember and enact the original instructions of Shonkwaia'tishon. Stories recall us to one another during such times of conflict, and they remind us of the relationships we are intended to have with *yethinisten:ha onhwéntsia* (Mother Earth) and all her children.[2] As such,

[2] The earth is a living, conscious being with agency. According to Rotinonhsonni history (discussed below), the earth was made from the body of Tekawerahkwa, the daughter of Atsi'tsiaka:yon (Skywoman) who fell from the Skyworld to start life in this world. Throughout this dissertation I therefore refer to the earth both as First Woman (Tekawerahkwa was the first woman born on earth), and as *yethinisten:ha onhwéntsia* (Mother Earth).

this dissertation focuses on oral histories, culturally foundational narrative teachings, and contemporary Indigenous literary works that act as a call to consciousness and have the potential to shift our minds from human- to land-centrism. In the history of the Great Law, the Peacemaker says that anyone can follow the white roots of *Tsioneratasekowa* and sit beneath its leaves of everlasting peace. In my opinion, this means that any human being who so desires can enact, in their own lives, the principles of reason, righteousness, and power in order to live peacefully. This is not a conferral of Indigenous identity or heritage; but rather, a personal practice of thinking, behaving, and relating in a good way (*ka'nikonhrí:yo*) to other people and to the earth and nonhumans, too.[3] *Yethinisten:ha onhwéntsia* is one of the best teachers of the principles of *ka'nikonhrí:yo*: she offers teachings to her children about how to live in harmony and balance with Creation, how to be land-centered. Rather than a destination or an achievable and permanent state, I understand this landed consciousness within the context of my own life as a continual process, a set of intentions that ask for careful, daily attention to the aliveness of all things, their rights to a good life, and to a healthy relationship with humans.

More specifically, this project seeks to widen conceptions of reading (*e.g.* what can be read, what counts as reading) to include the land (land in this usage includes specific place, the sentient earth, the soil, water, air and wetlands, as well as nonhuman societies who live in these places). I suggest that by offering perspectives of nation- and place-specific land-centrism, the novels of Linda Hogan (Chickasaw), Eden Robinson (Xa'isla), and Thomas King (Tsalagi) provide cultural context for interpreting the land as readable, and for attempting to perform such readings. Using a Rotinonhsonni methodology, method, and framework grounded in foundational cultural teachings, this dissertation theorizes an interconnected cycle of reading

[3] See Appendix A for a diagram of the principles of *ka'nikonhrí:yo*.

between Indigenous literatures and trees (as an example of "readable" land). In this cycle, Indigenous literatures help to develop the landed context for reading trees, and reading trees helps to deepen understandings of land-centrism within Indigenous literature. As such, I use teachings from *yotsìtsyonte o:se* (Eastern flowering dogwood) to read Hogan's novel, *Power* (1999); let *onen'takwenhten:sera* (redcedar) lead my analysis of Robinson's *Monkey Beach* (2000); and frame King's *Truth and Bright Water* (1999) with readings of *wahta* (maple). This thinking develops out of longstanding Indigenous traditions of understanding the land as our first teacher. For example, Yup'ik scholar Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley (2010) writes:

> It is through direct interaction with the environment that the Yupiaq people learn. What they learn is mediated by the cultural cognitive map. The map consists of those 'truths' that have been proven over a long period of time. As the Yupiaq people interact with nature, they carefully observe to find pattern or order where there might otherwise appear to be chaos. (88)

It is my contention that Indigenous literatures help to develop a "cultural cognitive map" of *yethinisten:ha onhwéntsia* as more than a "static backdrop to human experience" (Tuck 42). In this work, I do not intend to represent any author as Indigenous informant, or as a voice of authentic, cultural traditionalism; however, I do suggest that in many of the stories told by contemporary Indigenous writers, portrayals of land go beyond the material aspects of places to include their "spiritual, emotional, and intellectual aspects" (Styres et al. 37). Each of Hogan, Robinson, and King's novels offer important land-centred teachings that lead the way into learning what Kawagley refers to above as "truths." These truths – signposts in the cultural cognitive map – are key in processes of coming to know through observing and interacting with the land over long periods of time.

Ultimately, I propose that by carrying forward land-centred knowledge Indigenous literature offers opportunity for developing a cultural empiricism that expands the senses to include awareness of the earth as alive, cognizant, and capable of agency. (Re)awakening an awareness of *yethinisten:ha onhwéntsia*, and affirming Indigenous peoples' ancient, intergenerational, and ongoing relationships both with specific place and with our Mother on a holistic scale challenges settler colonialism's erasure of Indigenous presence (past, present, and future), its "thingification" of the earth (which makes it endlessly violable), and its externally imposed definitions of Indigeneity. Moreover, developing a sensitivity and receptiveness to the sentience of the land through Indigenous worldviews may also open pathways for improving or cultivating cross-cultural and nation-to-nation relationships.

As we go on this journey together, there are some stories that will connect us to the fabric of Rotinonhsonni culture and thought. These I will try to relate to the best of my ability and extent of my knowledge. These foundational histories are dynamic; the person who takes them up chooses where to place emphasis, how to weigh importance, and in which ways to interpret meaning. In other words, who we are influences the story, and the story influences who we are. I want to acknowledge that there are people in the Six Nations community who have studied our cultural teachings their entire lives and live these teachings every day. Though this work is not often acknowledged by the academic world, they are the true scholars, the true "doctors of philosophy," and they keep our culture alive. I am grateful for the work they do. On the other hand, I am new to these knowledges and am in no way an expert (insofar as we can imagine that experts exist). I cannot speak for the Rotinonhsonni culture or nation, only what I've learned as a Kanien'keha:ka woman who is continually seeking ways to connect to a community that I was adopted out of as an infant. What follows on these pages represents my personal experiences and

understandings of Rotinonhsonni teachings, philosophies and histories as I have come to know them from being in both academic and reserve communities and talking to friends, teachers, mentors, and the land.

Indigenous Research: Guiding Principles & Writing Autobiographically

If research doesn't change you as a person, then you haven't done it right.

~Shawn Wilson, Research is Ceremony

Whenever I speak about my research, or identify myself as Indigenous to others, I purposefully share background information about my life so that I can be "placed." To this end, in the Six Nations community I am usually asked for my mother's name as a process of trying to trace relations. This is made difficult for me because of my adoptive history, but fortunately, and to the credit of those community members who have been so trusting of me, explanations of my lost history have always been accepted. While such lines of questioning often signify curiosity and interest, they are also made necessary by histories of appropriation, intrusive research, exploitation and theft carried out by academics who prioritize colonial agendas and personal accolades over the well-being of Indigenous communities. This is partly why it is so important for me to engage in identifying myself and my work here, but you will soon see that my reasons for writing autobiographically go beyond these histories of appropriation and theft. I write myself into this dissertation because who I am directly influences the work that I do, and the work that I do directly influences the person that I am. Research, in my mind, is about becoming. It is about learning how to be *onkwehonwe* and to feed what the Rotinonhsonni call *ka'nikonhrí:yo*, "the good mind." I research because I seek to know how to live a good life. Nêhiyáw-Saulteaux researcher Margaret Kovach calls this "a prevailing teaching" in her work on Indigenous methodologies. She argues that "an Indigenous research framework must not solely

be an intellectual construct, for it cannot be understood in the absence of its practical manifestations, which involve living life in a way that reflects goodness" (63). To ethically implement an Indigenous methodology, it is incumbent upon me to manifest the principles about which I write, and to use that personal growth for communal rather than just individual benefit. "It's not just pedagogy," affirms Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg author, Leanne Simpson, "it's how to live life" ("Land" 18). According to Kanaka Maoli scholar Manulani Aluli Meyer, knowledge is "found in the quality of our life's practices. Pointing to ideas is not enough. It is found in how we inhabit these ideas. It is found in the quality of our relationships. Why wouldn't this include knowledge?" ("Spirit Revealed" 161). Thus, my research is not only about synthesizing and presenting ideas on these pages to prove my qualifications, but about who I become through Indigenous processes of coming to know, and how I embody that knowledge for the good of all my relations.

In writing autobiographically, I also seek to reflect and give recognition to the Indigenous, land-based processes of coming to know that I engage in my research. Because they are grounded in an interconnected natural world, these processes are fundamentally interrelational. Fyre Jean Graveline (Métis) says it succinctly when she writes, "knowing is a process of 'self-in-relation'" (52). In Kanien'keha, the verb to know, *ateryen:tare*, literally translates to "knowledge lands." When we say "I know," what we really express is that knowledge lands upon our minds. I have come to understand this within the context of learning from the land. Knowledge is not produced in isolation, but primarily from relationships with First Woman, the environment, peopled communities, nonhuman nations, and the spirit world.[4]

[4] I recognize that knowledge unfolds in people in different ways and has the potential to be actualized in different, and even conflicting ways. This teaching presents itself in the Rotinonhsonni creation story in the form of the twin brothers. It is my understanding that Sapling and Flint represent the kinds of generative and destructive thinking and choices we can make in life. This kind of duality is present in many forms of knowledge. For example, knowledge

To be explicit about the sources of knowledge, and the interrelational development of thought that inform this project – which I think is an ethical necessity – I must include my experiences. The knowledge that lands on me from interactions with my various environments and relationships unfolds and becomes meaningful within me in a way that is particular to me. The self is intrinsically tied to the unfolding of knowledge, what we might call interpretation. My experiences, my memories, my relationships, my state of mind (health) and my previous connections to knowing will shape how meaning unfolds within me in any given moment. Because coming to know is an embodied process that requires enacting the teachings to fully receive them, it becomes part of us and thus "unidentifiable except in a personal context" (Battiste and Henderson 36). The autobiographical element of this dissertation is therefore also part of a personal cognitive map intended to guide you, reader, through intimate learnings "created by humour, humility, tolerance, observation, experience, social interaction, and listening to the conversations and interrogations of the natural and spiritual worlds" (Battiste and Henderson 36). While this kind of acknowledgement or discussion of subjectivity has often been a marker of unsound research in academia, in systems of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) the "researcher" is the conduit for the knowledge and so, of course, influences the expression of the knowledge.[5] This is a positive outcome because it produces a multitude of knowledges representing various perspectives; meaning is derived "not through content or data, or even theory in a western context, which by nature is decontextualized knowledge, but through a compassionate web of interdependent relationships that are different and valuable because of that

of medicines can be used to help people, but it can also be used to put negative medicine on people. A Western example might be a drug like OxyContin, which helps relieve people of serious pain, but can also be abused recreationally. Fire is another example, as it gives life but can also consume and kill.

[5] Thanks to Amber Dean for reminding me that not all academic fields reject autobiographical elements from their research; it is a foundational practice in Feminist theory/Women's and Gender Studies, for example.

difference" (Simpson, *Land* 11). Such diversity of knowledge "become[s] the foundation of generated collective meanings and a plurality of truth" (11). As I understand it, this collective process of knowledge production reflects Rotinonhsonni Confederacy traditions of *tenkatsienhì:ia'ke* (it will cross over the fire). This term refers to part of the decision-making process of the Council, in which a resolution is formed and passed across "the fire" between nations and clans to either be accepted or rejected. This process – created to ensure peace between our clans and nations – considers the perspectives and opinions of the many in deciding what is best for the whole.[6] Writing autobiographically is also, therefore, about making my own contribution to collective meaning.

Within the pages of this project I argue, as Maori scholar Graham Smith does, "for subjectivity as being a more honest position" and "for my language, knowledge, and culture and against reproducing colonizing forces in my research." Smith advises naming these things overtly and including personal stories within our research in order to lay bare "biases and cultural nuances, preferences, [and] prejudices" (qtd. in Kovac 90). While I acknowledge that total transparency is unlikely – given that biases, motivations, and intentions are often a mystery even to ourselves – I share my stories as a process of tracing the many different sources of knowledge that feed this work, and to show how who I am influences my interpretation and application of that knowledge. Smith further argues that "every thesis is written laden with the author's own interests that are often submerged in the text," and that researcher's claims that their arguments are objective and neutral is "a load of bull, of course" (90). I do not claim neutrality; rather, I believe that situating myself will help to clarify my perspective and

[6] This is an over-simplification of a complex, sophisticated and ancient governing system, the likes of which cannot be fully described here. For more information see Sakokweniónkwas, *And Grandma Said* (334-363).

worldview. This honesty will, I hope, add to the integrity and rigour of the work, and perhaps even make it more enjoyable to read.

"Here is where consciousness transforms from an inside longing for meaning, into an outward expression of relevance" (Meyer, "Spirit Revealed" 153).

My birth mother is Kanien'keha:ka from Six Nations of the Grand River in Ohsweken, Ontario. I know she is Wolf Clan, that she likes long walks and that her favourite author in high school was Charles Dickens. I know her first name is Margaret, but I do not know her because she put me up for adoption when I was an infant. I want to be very clear about this from the beginning: what my birth mother did for me was an incredible act of selflessness and bravery. She was single, taking care of two elderly parents, made low income and felt unable to provide for me in the way that she wanted and felt I deserved. She took special care of us while pregnant, and made a careful selection of my adoptive parents. When she gave me up, my birth mother sent with me my own pair of moccasins, a Native doll, and a letter that explained her choice. She made clear through these gifts that she wanted me to have a connection to my Rotinonhsonni roots.

My adoptive parents are unusually good people; they adopted four special needs children, two of whom were older and came with foster care trauma. Each of the four of us comes from a different cultural background. Instead of trying to assimilate us into their concept of cultural identity, my parents made a special effort to help each of us explore our own heritages. This was particularly hard in my case. When my parents tried to make connections for me with Six Nations, they did not encounter much friendliness or support. Two white parents with an

Kanien'keha:ka baby is a dynamic that brings up a lot of bad history for Indigenous peoples whose children have been stolen and seized for generations. Nevertheless, when I showed interest, my parents helped me to invest in my Rotinonhsonni background in any way they could. Eventually, university offered me a way to learn about my people and to find a small community of other Indigenous students, but I still felt isolated. I felt that because I grew up outside of the reserve and didn't have an Indigenous family, name, or knowledge base, that I was at best an Indigenous impostor. The only thing that made me feel I might belong to my Kanien'keha:ka heritage was my connection to the land. And so, we return to trees. While I questioned my belonging to Six Nations, feared crossing the border between Brantford and the Six Nations reserve, and spent the better part of my twenties filled with feelings of unworthiness, I always returned to trees and the land as sources of unconditional love and acceptance. It wasn't until much later, however, that I encountered the epistemological frameworks to begin to understand that my feelings of connection to the land were not just imaginary, but in fact, real.

One of the most important Rotinonhsonni epistemologies that has led me deeper into understandings of Creation, myself, and my research is the story that tells of all our beginnings: the creation story. According to Rotinonhsonni history, Atsi'tsiaka:yon (Mature Blossoms aka Sky Woman) falls from the sky world into a world of water. She is caught mid-air by a flock of geese who deliver her onto the back of a giant sea turtle. There she is greeted by a counsel of water animals who offer to help her by diving for mud from the bottom of the waters so she can grow earth upon which to live. Though all the animals try their best, it is only tiny muskrat who is successful, though he dies in the process. Atsi'tsiaka:yon places the mud on turtle's back, and as she sings and dances it grows into a vast land. There she gives birth to a baby daughter, Tekawerahkwa (Breath of the Wind), the First Woman born to this world. Tekawerahkwa grows

quickly and is impregnated with twin boys by the West Wind. Tekawerahkwa dies in childbirth when one of her sons who is impatient to be born, forces his way out of her armpit instead of following his brother through the birth canal. Tekawerahkwa's body is buried in the earth, and from it grows sustenance and medicines. First Woman becomes the earth. When one of her sons, Sapling (the right-handed twin who was born naturally), later creates *onkwehonwe*, he uses that same earth to mould our bodies, and thus we call him Shonkwaia'tishon ("he who made our bodies"). Our material selves are made from the same mud and clay of the earth that muskrat brought up from the bottom of the ocean, the same mud and clay that Atsi'tsiaka:yon danced around to create Turtle Island. Sapling then breathed three times into our bodies to bring us to life, sharing some of his energy, the energy that enlivens all beings in Creation, to create our spirits. Human beings, then, are inherently connected in both body and spirit to *yethinisten:ha onhwéntsia*.

This creation story will reappear throughout the dissertation as will many of the other foundational Rotinonhsonni narratives. Although here I refer to the beginnings of our world as a story, in reality the various accounts we have from different Rotinonhsonni nations, historians, and narrators constitute a history.[7] This is an important distinction to make, as "creation stories" are often perceived in Western contexts as myths or metaphors rather than as histories, or as reflections of the real. Thus, throughout this dissertation I emphasize (by referring to our cosmologies as histories) that the events of our creation took place. As Vanessa Watts writes, these events "were not imagined or fantasized. This is not lore, myth or legend. These histories are not longer versions of 'and the moral of the story is….'. This is what happened" (21).

[7] My understanding of this history is informed by various written accounts (*e.g.*, Sotsisowah, J.N.B. Hewitt, Tehanetorens, Aná:taras, Kahente Horn-Miller, *etc.*), as well as by oral versions related by Six Nations community members. It should be noted that there is not an official version of this story, but many accounts related differently by each Nation.

Categorizing our Creation as myth, legend, or folklore belittles it and the traditions of knowledge from which it grows. Take, for example, a conversation I had with a student in a fourth-year seminar I taught on representations of Indigenous womanhood. When I shared a version of our creation history with the class, this student sought me out afterward needing my affirmation that this was a story, an allegory. She felt offended by references to the white nation as "little brothers," and identified this as a racist sentiment. She wanted me to tell her that the story was man-made, was influenced by bias and constructed by individuals who have survived colonization and hold a grudge. In the same breath, she affirmed the realness of the Bible, of Jesus Christ, and his teachings. The Bible, she insisted, is not man-made but is the word of God handed directly to the people; it is truth. She had great difficulty conceiving of the Bible as a representation, as a story crafted by men to represent experiences, thoughts or beliefs. She had equal difficulty conceiving of the Rotinonhsonni creation history as anything other than a piece of fiction all the more likely to be fictitious for its oral rather than written transmission.[8] While I had no difficulty creating space in my mind for this student's belief systems, she struggled to acknowledge that my history could be true, or that both our histories could simultaneously be true. In my experience, this insistence on a singular and righteous truth is a fundamental difference between Indigenous and Euro-Western belief systems. It has been strategically employed by those who seek to further colonialist agendas to dehumanize Indigenous peoples and relegate them to the bottom rungs of a human taxonomy that privileges white, heterosexual males. Mi'kmaw educator and scholar Marie Battiste refers to this myopic perspective as

[8] Thanks to Daniel Coleman for his insight on the irony of Judeo-Christian devaluations of Indigenous oral traditions when the Bible itself is oral memory written down: "Adam didn't write the Christian Creation Story in Genesis. This task is ascribed to the writer(s) of the Pentateuch, written centuries after the events" (Personal communication, March 18, 2017).

cognitive imperialism: the "hierarchical and patrimonial monologue" of Eurocentric thinkers who assume the superiority of their worldview and attempt to impose it on others (13). "Typically," Battiste writes, "this quest for universal definitions ignores the diversity of the people of the earth and their views of themselves" (37). Thus, the conversations I had with my student over the course of the term were not just about the two of us exchanging differing opinions, they were about trying to shift away from essentialisms of Indigenous peoples as primitive, uncivilized, incapable of abstract thought, and in need of a white saviour. They were about validating Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies within the context of both Christian and academic narratives of exceptionalism. I questioned, and sought to destabilize the kinds of naturalized veracity and assumed superiority of Judeo-Christian and scholarly knowledges that my student had been taught to take for granted. Thus, my pedagogy became focused on affirming our creation as a history, rather than a myth. I share this story because it highlights both the fraught terrain in which I conduct my research as a Kanien'keha:ka woman within the colonial institution of the university, and one of the goals of this dissertation: to not only write about the value of Indigenous knowledges but to apply them. To give breath to Rotinonhsonni thought- and life-ways in this academic space that is both symbolically and literally a colonial imposition on Indigenous lands, consciousness, and political distinctiveness may in some small way be an act of resurgence and healing. Even if it is only for my own resurgence and healing, that is not nothing.

Indigenous Knowledges

*"Knowledge does not limit us; our thoughts on knowledge limit us" (*Meyer, "Spirit Revealed" 162*).*

In this work that is personal, spiritual and academic, both Indigenous and Western, there is a need to identify and to some extent defend Indigenous Knowledge (IK). The fact that this type of project is possible in 2017 indicates to me that the academic world in general, and McMaster University in particular, is becoming more familiar with IK and beginning to listen to those who have fought – at great personal cost – for its place in spaces of higher learning. As such, I want to acknowledge the work of other Indigenous scholars who have created, through their brave and conscientious scholarship, space for IK as valid and valuable at McMaster University and in the broader consciousness of the academic world. *Nyawen'kowa* to Dawn Martin-Hill, Rick Monture, Theresa McCarthy, Bonnie Freeman, Vanessa Watts-Powless, Chelsea Gabel, Rick Hill, and many others who have forged a path for future generations. Without their efforts to affirm Indigenous methodologies and epistemologies, this entire dissertation would necessarily be occupied with defending rather than applying Indigenous knowledge.

In my understanding, knowledge is not a thing, a set of accomplishments, or a mastery of facts; coming to know is a relational process and a way of being. Coming to know is a holistic state of being receptive (through mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual engagement) to learning from nonhuman societies and *yethinisten:ha onhwéntsia*, what Battiste and Henderson refer to as "the intelligible essences" of an ecology (25). Rotinonhsonni-Anishinaabe scholar Vanessa Watts-Powless also acknowledges the autonomous cognizance of the earth in her articulation of "place-thought." She explains that Rotinonhsonni and Anishinaabe worldviews

are "based upon the premise that land is alive and thinking and that humans and non-humans derive agency through the extensions of these thoughts" (21). This perspective speaks to "the common intersections of the female, animals, the spirit world, and the mineral and plant world" in a view of society that "revolves around interactions between these worlds rather than solely interactions amongst human beings" (21). This means that in addition to learning from conversations with people, from the written word and other graphic forms of thought, I come to know through intuition, dreams, ceremony, observing, meditating, breathing, loving, moving, and listening to Creation's forces. Through relationships with animals, plants, celestial bodies, spirits, and natural forces, I acquire "awareness, familiarity, conceptualization, and beliefs" about an ecosystem (Battiste and Henderson 48). This interrelated learning from the natural world involves "accumulating experiences, conducting non-formal experiments, and developing intimate understandings of the given consciousness and language, at a specific location and during a specific period of time" (48). Coming to know is therefore not only about a relationship to earth, but about relating to specific place.

Places hold experiential and relational memories that mark themselves within the dirt. As the place where their material selves return upon death, the land also literally holds our ancestors and their memories, so when I am in a place, that specific place holds knowledge both as an entity in and of itself, and of my ancestors who lived there in past days. If I develop a relationship with that place, then that knowledge may unfold within me (whether or not I have an awareness of this unfolding and the frameworks to interpret it are another matter).

Meyer frames such place-based processes of coming to know through landed consciousness as a form of cultural empiricism, an expanded sensory encounter with the interconnected energy of the universe (quantum plenum):

> This different understanding of epistemology began with my own Hawaiian people. It came from listening to those grounded in na mea waiwai (the depth and richness of our own knowledge traditions). It was delivered through song by those who understood the emotion of rains, and why stones were gendered. It arrived from those who sailed vast open oceans with veracious acumen and mythic curiosity. The idea that native people have a unique way of engaging with the world birthed cultural empiricism without apology. It was almost too obvious—this notion that sensuality is culturally instructed and geographically situated within a quantum plenum. Clarity grew from under blue sky and within clear water as beaches and streams nourished my understanding and dreams, and detailed noa huna (the secret insights from seen/unseen sources). It came from ‘ike mo’olelo’, (our stories and the consciousness), but it was the practising of our own ideas found in our own language that instructed my thinking the most. (“Spirit Revealed” 152-153)

Within the context of Kanaka Maoli epistemology, cultural empiricism suggests that we may have more senses than the five we generally acknowledge. Meyer affirms that “senses are culturally defined;” senses are developed and influenced by “nuanced qualities of how cultural people, distinct to a place, see and participate in the world” (“Hawaiian Epistemology” 391). Thus, our sensual interpretation of the world expands or contracts depending upon cultural foundations. Giving the example of Kanaka Maoli as “island people [who] know the ocean” Meyer explains that “individual and collective histories and priorities” give value to “sights, sounds, smells and so on” (391). Thus, the smell of the tides, and the moon’s influence on the tides, and the fish are all interconnected and meaningful; “All are named, understood and recognized” (391). According to Meyer, this expanded empiricism – a process of cultural

interpretation akin to reading the land – plays a significant role in defining Hawaiian culture. The routes for coming to know that Meyer describes include physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual engagements with the natural world. Like Battiste and Henderson's "intelligible essences," and Watts-Powless' "place-thought," Meyer expresses a perspective that recognizes all matter in the universe as imbued with consciousness and agency. To put it differently, and from a Western perspective (as Meyer does), the foundational teachings of Kanaka Maoli culture (and other Indigenous cultures) develop an enriched inwardness that allows perception of the sentient energies of the quantum plenum.[9] Her reference to the "quantum plenum" gestures to recent paradigm shifts in Eurocentric science that are now beginning to acknowledge what Indigenous peoples have known since time immemorial: all things in the universe are connected and related. This articulation of an implicate order espouses an "ultraholistic cosmic view" of the "unbroken wholeness of the totality of existence as an undivided flowing movement without borders" (Bohm 80). In this view of an implicate order, "the whole is enfolded within each part" (Battiste and Henderson 124) so that any element in the plenum can reveal information about every other element in the universe. To return to Meyer's quote then, understanding is birthed not only from observing the rain, stones, ocean, sky and beaches, but from interacting and communicating with them (*i.e.* seen/unseen sources; matter and energy of the quantum plenum). Stories, first languages, and ceremonies strengthen our ecological kinship and grow in us the capacity to read the signs of nature's language, and the signs of the ancestors' ongoing life in the

[9] Plenum biophysicist Mark Comings explains that "there is now widespread recognition that the quantum vacuum is not really a vacuum at all because it's actually filled with enormous amounts of energy and potential" (5). In place of this misnomer (vacuum), Comings offers the phrase "quantum plenum" to denote the "absolute fullness" of "so-called empty space" which is in fact "a very energy dense medium filled with radiant potential to degrees that far exceed, by many orders of magnitude, the energies constituting matter" (5). Arguing for congruency between western science and traditions of "spiritual wisdom," Comings theorizes that energy is more fundamental to the structure of the universe than matter, which leads him to believe that sentient energy is the basis of all things, both animate and inanimate.

land. This worldview is represented by the Rotinonhsonni creation history, and has been enacted in our ceremonies since our earliest beginnings.

According to Watts-Powless, First Woman can communicate with us, her great-great-grandchildren, because we are always already connected to her in both body and mind (21). This understanding also resonates with Meyer's description of how cultural empiricism offers access to secret insights from unseen sources (*i.e.* the quantum plenum/intelligible essences of nature). Indigenous cultural teachings – such as cosmologies – expand attentiveness to the sentient energy of the quantum plenum (the fabric of the universe). This cultural empiricism of the spirit teaches us to pay attention to relationships, phenomenon, impressions, and sensitivities that Western society often does not acknowledge as real or meaningful.

Leanne Simpson also expresses an understanding of grounded processes of coming to know from a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabe perspective. She explains that "coming into wisdom … takes place in the context of family, community and relations" where "the land, aki, is both context and process. The process of coming to know is learner-led and profoundly spiritual in nature" ("Land" 7). "Education," she continues, "comes from the roots up. It comes from being enveloped by land. An individual's intimate relationship with the spiritual and physical elements of creation is at the centre of a learning journey that is life-long" (9). These descriptions of land-based pedagogy may help with suspending judgement and coming to accept one of the central premises of this dissertation: that trees are sentient beings capable of effecting change and communicating with humans, in this case, me.

Based upon my understanding of the Rotinonhsonni creation history, I suspect that trees have long communicated with *onkwehonwe* in the way that I feel they communicate with me. Our original purpose as *onkwehonwe* is to act as extensions of First Woman, to live off of and

care for our Mother the earth. When I walk on the land and feel nostalgia, affection or sleepiness it is proof of what Watts-Powless calls non-human agency; it is the land (in this case trees) using our shared origins to interact with my thoughts, senses and intuitions. This kind of nonhuman communication happens continuously, and it is but a question of our awareness of it. While many *onkwehonwe* still carry the ability to read the land as hunters, medicine gatherers, gardeners, and artists, for example, many others (such as myself) have had their landed relationships (and thus their ability to communicate with the land) disrupted by colonialism. Colonialism's attempt at cultural erasure and ethnic cleansing of Indigenous peoples plays a significant role in this breakdown. In "Toward a National Literature," Stó:lō writer Lee Maracle shows how the systematic attack of Indigenous knowledge was one prong of the settler state's cultural genocide exerted against Indigenous Peoples. [10] "We have been deliberately disconnected from our original bodies of knowledge," writes Maracle. This disconnection "was orchestrated by the legal, military, and state machinery of the colonizer who aborted the process of knowledge transmission among First Nations knowledge keepers and their children" (79). "Many of the [knowledge] transmitters were murdered" (79), and the new generations of Indigenous children they would have taught were stolen and forced into residential schools or child welfare. Furthermore, artefacts, ceremonies, and Indigenous languages – mediums for knowledge transmission – were outlawed. While Indigenous peoples were barred from accessing their own knowledge, "much of the knowledge was appropriated" by settlers, altered, and commercialized (79). As a result, Maracle claims, Indigenous knowledge is fragmented, detached from its original contexts and dissociated from its intended purposes. This disruption of

[10] While cultural genocide is the appropriate term here, it should also be made clear that genocide is what has been perpetrated against Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island. I in no way wish to imply a moderation of this genocide by suggesting that it was "only" cultural; it was not.

Indigenous knowledge transmission combined with imposed Eurocentric worldviews of human separation from and superiority to land impede *onkwehonwe* landed relationships. Without the frameworks of cultural knowledge necessary to interpret place-thought, human reception to and understanding of non-human communication is limited (not to mention the fact that it was demonized and seen as witchcraft by Christian-minded, colonial settlers).

In order to deny Indigenous peoples' prior claims to land by either annihilating or assimilating them, settler colonialism intentionally ruptured Indigenous intergenerational knowledge transmission by breaking apart families, stealing children, overthrowing traditional governments, violently imposing patriarchal definitions of family and identity rather than matriarchal clan based systems, and banning ceremonies and languages. Within Rotinonhsonni communities (and in many others) this settler colonial violence forced the *o'nikonhra* (mind-body complex) of *onkwehonwe* out of balance. As it was explained to me by Cayuga elder Norma General, *o'nikonhra* – which shares the same root as *ka'nikonhrí:yo* (good mindedness) – not only refers to our minds, but to our whole being: mind, emotions, body, and spirit. When we are healthy, each of these parts of ourselves is in balance and aligned, creating peace. When these aspects of ourselves are misaligned and out of balance due to illness, grief, or trauma for example, then that peace is disrupted.[11]

In the *Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen*[12] (Words that Come Before All Else) that opened this work, the phrase "*Étho niyontónhak nè:ne onkwa'nikòn:ra*" (So shall it stay in our minds) repeats after the acknowledgement and thanks for each being or natural element in Creation. This phrase can also be interpreted as "and now our minds are one." It is a reference to the concept of

[11] See Appendix B for diagram of *o'nikonhra*.
[12] Tom Porter suggests that a more literal translation of this phrase means, "what we say before we do anything important."

ka'nikonhrí:yo (good mindedness), which is related to the notion of good health (*o'nikonhra*). When we speak the *Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen* (with meaning rather than by rote), we send that gratitude and love back into the good energy of the implicate order, to the Creation that gifts us that energy in the first place. This everyday ceremony has real-life implications, as giving thanks is one of our original instructions from Shonkwaia'tishon, and speaking the Thanksgiving shows Creation that we remember those instructions, that we remember how to live in a good way, in harmony with life. The Address reaffirms that each element of the natural world has a relationship to us here on earth, including grandmother moon, grandfather thunderers, and our elder brother the sun. Giving back some of that energy also helps to sustain Creation. As in any relationship, there needs to be reciprocity. When we speak the *Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen*, we unite our minds as a people with a common set of beliefs and goals, but we also unite our minds with Creation. Speaking the Thanksgiving helps us to align our *o'nikonhra* with Creation, it helps us be of good mind and to find peace. This practice also exemplifies how Rotinonhsonni learn to attend to inner senses through ceremony. In this instance, therefore, the *Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen* draws our attention to the intelligible essences of nature, the full, sentient energy of the universe and how we are connected and dependent upon those energies for our living. Reaffirming in our own minds the existence and agency of this energy through this speech creates an illuminating sense of the true interconnectedness of all life and how we might embrace that interconnectedness and accept its guidance. Thus, when I sit with a tree, walk the land, watch bees collect pollen, or any other practice of emplacement, and unbidden thoughts or feelings come to me, I have the capacity to consider that they may be communication from unseen forces like animal spirits, medicine beings, ancestors, or First Woman. But this is only a

small part of the much larger cycle of *Kayanerekowa*, which is important for us to explore in more depth as it serves as the overall framework for this dissertation.

The Peacemaker and *Kayanerekowa*

The history of the Peacemaker and the Great Law of Peace is one of those teachings that is foundational to *onkwehonweneha*[13]. This is a history that could take a lifetime to learn properly. A fuller portrayal would most assuredly take up all the pages of this dissertation. What I offer here is brief by necessity, but its purpose is to ensure a basic, shared level of familiarity in readers of concepts and terms that I return to throughout the dissertation.[14]

According to Kanien'keha:ka scholar Amber Adams, the founding of *Kayanerekowa* occurred anywhere between circa 30 C.E. to circa 1500 C.E., though most likely between 900 and 1200 C.E. (37). This was "one of those dark times in our history, when the culture, ceremonies and the peaceful ways of life were almost lost" (Porter 272). *Onkwehonwe* forgot the very existence of Shonkwaia'tishon and no longer followed their original instructions. It was a time of violence, in which an endless cycle of "blood feuds and revenge killings left all people living in a state of chaos and fear" (Monture 6). In the midst of all this bloodshed, a Huron woman gave birth to a fatherless boy on the north side of *Kanyatariio* ("beautiful/good lake;" Lake Ontario) near the Bay of Quinte. Sotsisowah (John Mohawk) writes that the boy grew very fast and "concluded early in life that the system of blood feuds … needed to be abolished" so he carved a white stone canoe (a symbol of his spiritual power) and sailed it across the Bay of Quinte to bring a message of peace to the Kanien'keha:ka (*Thinking* 240).

[13] Rick Monture helped me understand the meaning of this phrase as, "in the ways of the people." It can also be understood as Rotinonhsonni thought- and life-ways.
[14] For a more in-depth account of the Great Law of Peace see, *Concerning the League: the Iroquois League Tradition* as Dictated in Onondaga by John Arthur Gibson.

In Kanien'keha:ka territory, Peacemaker sought out those individuals known to be the worst perpetrators of violence – nine Kanien'keha:ka men who were murderers and cannibals – and shared with them his message of peace. Indisputably pointing out the wrongs human beings committed against each other, Peacemaker informed the people that Shonkwaia'tishon "had not intended that human beings would abuse one another. Human beings whose minds are healthy always desire peace, and humans have minds that enable them to achieve peaceful resolutions of their conflicts" (*Thinking* 241). Peacemaker drew the Kanien'keha:ka together with the notion of a "government" that would prevent war and abuse of human beings "by cultivating a spiritually healthy society" (241).

In bringing *Kayanerekowa* to the *onkwehonwe*, Peacemaker "argued not for the establishment of law and order, but for the full establishment of peace," which was defined as the outcome of a society that strives to enact principles of righteousness, reason, and power (Sotsisowah, *Basic* 33). "Righteousness," according to Sotsisowah, refers to "the shared ideology of the people using their purest and most unselfish minds." In the language, we refer to this concept of good mindedness as *ka'nikonhrí:yo*. Righteousness "occurs when the people put their minds and emotions in harmony with the flow of the universe and the intentions of the 'Good Mind' or the Great Creator." Enacting righteousness requires "that all thoughts of prejudice, privilege, or superiority be swept away, and that recognition be given to the reality that the creation is intended for the benefit of all equally – even the birds, animals, trees, and insects, as well as the humans" (33). Reason is "the power of the human mind to make righteous decisions about complicated issues" (33). In the language, this capacity for reason is referred to as *ka'shatstenhsera*, strength. When we use good mindedness and good words we become strong. Reason is the choice to use our good minds to guide our actions. When Shonkwaia'tishon created

onkwehonwe, he gave us the "gift of the power of reason in order that [we] may settle [our] differences without the use of force" (33). The Peacemaker reminded the *onkwehonwe* of the importance of using our rational minds and taught us that "in every instance humans should use every effort to counsel about, arbitrate, and negotiate their differences, and that force should be resorted to only as a defense against the certain use of force" (33). Power refers to the ability "to enact a true peace," what we call, *sken:nen*. When the people are unified on the path of righteousness and reason, they can enact the principles of peace "through education, public opinion, and political, and when necessary, military unity" (34). In other words, when a people use their good minds to guide their words and actions, they produce a "spiritually conscious society" that produces peace not only for themselves, but within wider Creation, that network of relationships of which they are comprised. This is why *Kayanerekowa* is both a political and spiritual system (34).

While offering these teachings of peace to the Kanien'keha:ka, Peacemaker meets Hayenhwá:tha ("he keeps them awake"), who is overcome with grief over the loss of his three daughters who were killed by the Onöñda'gega' sorcerer Atotarho. Peacemaker uses wampum in the first Condolence Ceremony on Hayenhwá:tha to lessen his grief. Hayenhwá:tha then becomes the Peacemaker's spokesperson, and together they spread the message of peace to the onʌyoteˀa·ká ("people of the standing stone;" Oneida), Onöñda'gega' ("people of the hill;" Onondaga), Gayogohó:no' ("people of the great swamp;" Cayuga), and Onötowá'ka:' ("big mountain people;" Seneca).

Peacemaker and Hayenhwá:tha try to deliver their message of peace to the Onöñda'gega', but the powerful and twisted Atotarho refuses them, so they turn away and leave. They meet with more success in bringing the principles of peace, power, and righteousness to the

Onötowá'ka:', Gayogohó:no', and onʌyote?a·ká nations, and so together with the Kanien'keha:ka, they return to speak with Atotarho. Uniting their voices, the men of the four nations sing a great song of peace that protects them and allows them to approach Atotarho unharmed.[15] As artist Elizabeth Doxtater tells it, when he is ready to "completely transform from the 'creature' that he had become," (25) Atotarho's body is crooked, and his hair is tangled with snakes, reflecting his twisted mind. Peacemaker and Hayenhwá:tha "hel[p] to straighten him, some say by using the power of the 'good mind'" (25). To help straighten his mind, Peacemaker makes Atotarho one of the fifty chiefs of the Rotinonhsonni Confederacy. Peacemaker then plants *Tsioneratasekowa,* the Great White Pine Tree of Peace, under which he casts all the weapons of the Five Nations. Because of the significance of The Great Tree of Peace to this project, I quote here at length from Sakokweniónkwas' description of this planting and its symbolism:

> And then the Peacemaker told them to hold hands together in a symbolic way: lock their arms together. 'And in a big circle the fifty Chiefs will be and,' he said, 'in the middle of that circle where the Chiefs are holding hands, I will plant the Great Tree of Peace. And it will be so tall that it will pierce the sky. And it will be the symbol of sharing, the symbol of brotherhood and the symbol of peace in the world. And the roots will be so big and they will be white, one to the north, the east, the south, and the west. And they will carry peace to the world. And those roots are white, so they can be noticed by all. And when people see the white roots, if they want peace, they can follow them. And they can make their minds known where the Tree of Peace was planted, in

[15] In some versions of the history, Atotarho sees Peacemaker's kind face reflected in his cooking pot and thinking that it is his own face, begins to change. The kindness that he sees does not agree with his behaviour – murder, cannibalism, and using bad medicine to hurt people – so he decides of his own volition, to change and listen to Peacemaker's message.

> Onondaga country. And there they will seek to sit in peace, in the shade of the tree, with all of us Iroquois nations. He said, 'But you must hold tightly in there. For inside of that circle are your people, your territory, your clans, your language. Everything that you have is in there and is protected by the fifty leaders.'
>
> And he said, 'But I want you to know that in the coming years, there will be a people coming here that you've never seen before. And they will carry an axe with them. And they will sneak under the arms of the leaders that are in the circle surrounding the tree, when they are not looking or paying attention. And they will come in there, trying not to be seen, and they will try to destroy the Tree of Peace. And they will take the axe and they will hack the roots, the four roots, because they want the tree and what it stands for to fall. They want to kill it.'
>
> And he said, 'When that has been done, the tree will begin to die, because it'll be getting no more nourishment from its roots in Mother Earth. When it dies, it will begin to fall, and all that it stands for will begin to fall. But because those fifty leaders are holding hands together around it, it will fall on their clasped arms. And therefore it won't hit the ground. But it will hit a blow to them, because it's so big and heavy. And now they must hold it on their arms, whereas before it was upright.' (307-8)

Finally, Sakokweniónkwas relates, our prophesies tell of a time when the chiefs' strength will give out, and they will not be able to keep the tree from falling. As it begins to fall the rest of the way to the ground, from each of the cardinal directions great-great- *onkwehonwe* grandchildren will come running and by the hundreds they will grab the tree before it falls and they will stand it upright once again (309). As a great-great- *onkwehonwe* grandchild, this work right here, these words, are part of my efforts, part of my strength that I share to help *Tsioneratasekowa* stand

upright again. Using *Kayanerekowa* as the framework for my dissertation is part of that effort. Putting my whole heart into thinking about and grappling with these foundational Rotinonhsonni teachings is how I enact my culture, it is how I contribute to keeping it alive and moving, it is how I help to apply its meaning and lessons in day-to-day life, and how I help to keep the tree standing upright for my daughter.

One important clarification to make before moving on to a detailed explanation of the *Kayanerekowa* and its role in this dissertation is the difference between the Great Law of Peace and the Great Nice. As I understand it, *Kayanerenhserako:wa*, meaning the Great Nice, is an understanding of all the energy and matter in the universe as love. It is a vision of Creation and our existence here that sees all things as growing from and returning to a shared source of love and peace. *Kayanerekowa*, or the Great Law of Peace, are the instructions passed onto *onkwehonwe* from the Peacemaker that develop and sustain within us an awareness of and connection to this love. The word "law" here does not signify in the same ways that it does in Western contexts. It is not a list of rules or regulations with consequences, but is closer to Natural Law. The principles of *Kayanerekowa* – good mindedness (*ka'nikonhrí:yo*), peace (*sken:nen*), and strength (*ka'shatstenhsera*) – are connected in a relationship that will lead those who take up these principles on a path of peace. *Kayanerekowa* is an articulation of divine insight made human for our benefit, and for the benefit of Creation. The three main principles that power the cycle of *Kayanerekowa* are *ka'nikonhrí:yo* (good mindedness), *ka'shatstenhsera* (strength; reason), and *sken:nen* (peace, well-being, health, harmony). Amber Adams explains that in order to empower *Kayanerekowa*, people must use *ka'nikonhrí:yo* to guide their *ka'shatstenhsera* which will produce *sken:nen* both internally and in all of Creation.[16] In order to

[16] See Appendix C for a diagram of the relationship between the principles of *Kayanerekowa*.

enact this process, peoples' *o'nikonhra* (bodymind complex) must be balanced and healthy so that they are able to connect to *Kayanerenhserako:wa* (The Great Nice). As everything in Creation has a role, this is the role that people are to play, as instructed by Shonkwaia'tishon. If we are unable to fulfill this role, then Creation becomes unbalanced and out of harmony. Thus, *Kayanerekowa* is not only a spiritual and ceremonial process, but a political practice designed to keep Creation in balance with human kind.

What I have come to understand about *ka'nikonhrí:yo* is that it is impossible to achieve a state of permanent good mindedness. What this principle refers to is a process of trying to be. It is an ideal that encourages us to foster patterns of compassionate, kind, honest, fair, and responsible thinking. Tehahenteh (Kanien'keha:ka, Turtle Clan), one of my Kanien'keha instructors, once described this to me through the metaphor of walking through grass. The first time you walk through a meadow of grass you have to create the path, but the next time may be a little easier. After you walk that way dozens of times the grass stays flattened and parted, creating a path that is easy to see and follow in the future. *Ka'nikonhrí:yo* is something to engage habitually, to make part of our routines of healthy living. In her reading of the Rotinonhsonni creation history, Amber Adams argues that good health is the equivalent of a good mind. *Ka'nikonhrí:yo*, "integrates individuals' internal currents with those of her social, spiritual, and ecological context," explains Adams. Health, according to Adams, "means reaffirmation of one's relationship with Earth as the literal and intimate source of one's life" (75). In other words, to be healthy and develop good ways of thinking necessitates awareness of and communication with First Woman. The *Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen* provides a good example of the interconnection of these concepts. By acknowledging, giving thanks and love to each being in Creation as a relation of ours, we align our minds with those societies and the gifts they share with us. This ceremony

generates an attitude of gratitude and respect as well as an awareness of our interdependence with the earth, other humans, animals, waters, medicine and food plants, trees, air, cosmic bodies and spirits. We recognize that human life depends on and grows out of these relationships, and that we have responsibilities to reciprocate this love, and to protect the peaceful living of these relatives.

Ka'shatstenhsera is usually translated to mean power, strength, and the capacity to effect change. In a lecture on Kanien'keha terminology within the *Kayanerekowa*, Tehahenteh explains that *ka'shatstenhsera* is an intelligent energy or force that has always been here – in English we call it nature.[17] To explain *ka'shatstenhsera*, Tehahenteh uses the image of brain synapses firing. The synapse contains a small gap separating neurons, and when we have thought an electric pulse or spark fires over that gap between neurons. That spark is a small part of the energy that makes up Creation, that is found in every part and being of Creation. When we use *ka'nikonhrí:yo* to create those sparks we send good energy back to the Creation in reciprocity for the energy it gives us. This is what we do, for example, when we speak the *Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen*. Everything in Creation has *ka'shatstenhsera*. When the Creator made humans, he made our material selves from the earth – so we are all connected to the earth and to each other – and then he breathed into us three times, creating our spirits or energy selves. So *ka'shatstenhsera* is that breath, that energy that Creator gave us. Everything is made up of that energy and when we use a good mind it feeds the source of that energy in a good way.

Ka'shatstenhsera can also be understood as subjectivity and agency. *Ka'shatstenhsera*, explains Adams, is "the capacity of a person, a nation, a confederacy, or a biome to effect change." When this "potency," writes Adams, is "directed by ka'nikonhrí:yo, a person's

[17] Tehahenteh. Kanien'keha 101. Six Nations Polytechnic, Ohsweken, Ontario, 9 Dec. 2015. Class lecture.

cultivated good will expressed intellectually, rationally, emotionally, and socially," it produces "a thriving, self sustaining momentum." By using *ka'nikonhrí:yo* to direct *ka'shatsténhsera,* we create *skén:nen*: "the fullest expression of accord and harmony across and between personal, social, and ecological borders" (Adams 38).

The Kanien'keha expression, *she:kon, skennen'kowa ken*, is used as a greeting and to ask someone how they are. Literally, this phrase translates as "again, peace?" More generally, it is understood to mean: "still, is the peace with you?" It is a reference to walking the path of *Kayanerekowa*. *Sken:nen* not only refers to peace (*i.e.* the absence of conflict), but also to health and well-being. Using *ka'nikonhrí:yo* to guide *ka'shatsténhsera* produces *skén:nen* in one's life, and *skén:nen* in turn fuels ka'nikonhrí:yo and so the cycle continues. As every being in Creation, including rocks, stars, wind, animals, and grass is *ka'shatsténhsera*-bearing, every being in Creation is also capable of existing in a state of *skén:nen* and of producing *skén:nen*. To properly energize the cycle of *Kayanerekowa* then, we must consider the health and well-being not only of humans, but of those nonhuman societies and nations that in English are commonly referred to as nature. In fact, it is not possible for us to inhabit *skén:nen* without attending to our relationships with nature. This is something perhaps better understood when we consider *kenten:ron*, the medium that holds all three principles of the cycle together.

Amber Adams describes *kenten:ron* as "a relationship confirmed and renewed on a spiritual level, irrespective of differences in age, gender, or social status that typically constrain social relationships in the West" (39). *Kenten:ron*, she says, is "much stronger than the pale English friendship or even the various categories of love Euro-American society recognizes – romantic, parental, fraternal" (39). Rather, it is "the medium that bonds all [the] independent, ka'shatsténhsera-bearing parts of Creation in mutual will, and recalls them to one another when

conflict erupts" (Adams 39). *Kenten:ron*, in turn, is produced and renewed by the interrelationship of *owén:na* (words, voice, tone, discourse, rhetoric, verbal, aural, facial communication) and *orì:wa* (business, matters, dealings, mutual undertaking, wills joined in common pursuit). As Adams puts it, "A very practical outlet for personal ka'shatsténhsera, the owén:na – the human verbal, aural, and facial communication – that is the medium of orì:wa leads its participants into the kentèn:ron that holds them together" (41). In other words, story sits at the very heart of a cycle meant to ensure universal peace. I understand *kentèn:ron*, then, as a form of deep ecological kinship, reinforced by our languages, ceremonies, and stories, which impart in us a true experience of each being in Creation as a living relative. Thus, the interaction of *orì:wa* and *owén:na* inform a Rotinonhsonni consciousness centered upon the earth as *tsi niyonkwarih:ten* (our kind of matter) within the cycle of *Kayanerekowa*.

In Kanien'keha:ka the verb "to need," *tewakatonhwentsyó:ni,* translates literally to "I need the earth, it is my need." The prefix 'te' signals duality, 'wak' is the personal pronoun, 'at' makes the verb reflexive, "onhwentsy" is the earth, and "ó:ni" means also. In grammar, a reflexive verb is a verb whose direct object is the same as its subject, for example, "I wash myself." The reflexive in *tewakatonhwentsyo:ni* then suggests the meaning, "I need myself, the earth" or "I need the earth, myself." In other words, our interdependence with the earth is so fundamental that it is built into the language. The reflexive in this context also seems to suggest that we as humans are part of the earth and so our need for the earth is a need to know, see, or feel the self as part of the earth. This concept is related to another Kanien'keha:ka phrase, *tsi niyonkwarih:ten*, that is our kind of matter. The noun root "rih" comes from *orì:wa*, meaning business or matter. As Amber Adams explains, this concept includes "any kind of dealings or mutual undertaking between people, describing an active endeavor in which people join their

wills and energies in common pursuit" (40). Adams continues, stating that the root -rihw- is almost always bound in a verb phrase, such as *tsi niyonkwa**rih**:ten*. "Orì:wa suggests the dialogic reciprocity of owén:na in the long term," writes Adams. Using the root word -rihw- in "verb phrases with two-party pronominal prefixes reveals, at the owén:na level, Haudenosaunee perceptions of human activity as being essentially cooperative. (Although grammatically possible, the construction tsi niwakerih:ten, that is my kind of business, is one I've never heard a speaker use)" (41). Put differently, the predominant use in this phrase of the pronominal prefix -*yonkwa*- meaning both "you all and I" and "they all and I," reveals an interconnected worldview with the potential for global inclusivity: this is *our* kind of matter. To then juxtapose *tsi niyonkwarih:ten,* this is our kind of (global) matter, with *tewakatonhwentsyo:ni* or for congruency, *teyonkwatonhwentsyo:ni*, we need (the earth, ourselves), suggests that the earth as our need is our shared matter. Placed within the context of *Kayanerekowa,* this complex term suggests that communicating (*owén:na*) about *yethinisten:ha onhwéntsia* (*orì:wa*; our shared matter) creates *kenten:ron* not only between *onkwehonwe,* but between *onkweshon:'a* (all people), and in fact, all beings on this planet. We all depend utterly upon Mother Earth for our survival and for *skén:nen*, and so she is our shared matter. In a time when climate change is threatening thousands of species on earth, including humans, and hatred, violence and war exacerbated by xenophobia and settler capitalism are part of our daily realities, there is a great need for *kenten:ron* to recall us to one another amidst this conflict. Perhaps remembering our shared belonging to the earth, and thus to each other, might straighten and realign our minds to a land-centrism that disallows such violence against our Mother and each other. There is a great need, then, for stories that generate such land-centrism, that remind us of *teyonkwatonhwentsyo:ni* (we need, the earth, ourselves). While within Rotinonhsonni society,

orations such as *Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen*, the Condolence Ceremony, the Creation History, *Kayanerekowa, Kariwi:io* (the Code of Handsome Lake), and each of the ceremonies performed at *kanonhses* (our ceremonial longhouses) year round, bring *orì:wa* and *owén:na* together to create *kenten:ron* in our communities, access to these aspects of our culture is not always equal or easy. This is especially true when we remember the colonizing strategies that have been so effective at endangering *onkwehonweneha* and breaking down intergenerational knowledge transmission. It is for this reason that I suggest two more possible sites for Indigenous knowledge resurgence: Indigenous narrative art and the land herself.[18]

Cyclical Readings of Land and Literature

This dissertation explores, through juxtapositions of Rotinonhsonni oral histories, contemporary Indigenous literature, and a series of selected trees, the possibility of (re)learning to read and communicate with the land. I argue that Indigenous literatures offer perspectives of the aliveness, intelligible essence, and agency of the earth and nonhumans. This perspective of an enlivened universe in which humans play only a part – often carried forward from sites of original knowledge such as cosmologies, traditional speeches, ceremonies, socio-political structures, and subsistence practices – demonstrates an Indigenous paradigm of land-centrism. In other words, by carrying forward land-centered knowledge, contemporary Indigenous narrative art stimulates an awareness of the land and non-human societies as cognizant, in communication with, and influencing us. In turn, land-centered thinking is essential for engaging what I understand as the original site of Indigenous knowledge: the land. As much of this introduction has been dedicated to showing, Indigenous peoples have long learned from their nonhuman

[18] I use the term Indigenous narrative art to denote the creation and expression of a variety of sources of *owén:na* including but not limited to: literature, traditional speeches, histories, wampum, epic teachings, personal stories, sacred stories, poetry, songs, and scholarly writing.

relations how to survive and live in balance and harmony with the land; they read the land. In "Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation," Leanne Simpson epitomizes this process in the story of Kwezens and Ninaatigoog (maple trees). Kwezens spends her days out on the land playing, exploring, and watching. She sees red squirrel nibble and suck on the bark of a maple tree. When Kwezens tries this herself, she discovers maple sap! Because Kwezens views the squirrel as an intelligent being, capable of communication, she attributes meaning to his actions, which allows her to bring new knowledge to her people. By spending time on the land and observing its natural functions, Kwezens develops Nishnaabeg intelligence. This story demonstrates that, although Indigenous knowledge has been disrupted and fragmented by colonialism, our original means of developing that knowledge persists. First Woman has long been our teacher, and she still holds knowledge ready to share with those of us who have forgotten, lost, or never knew her teachings. Reading the land is a skill, however, that requires purposeful development. This is where I see Indigenous literature making an important contribution in evolving the thoughtways helpful in learning how to read the land, and thus playing a part in filling a knowledge gap created by colonialism. I suggest that practicing Indigenous landed pedagogies fosters stronger and more intimate relationships with the land, which in turn necessitates consideration of the rights and protections to which *yethinisten:ha onhwéntsia* is entitled, and of our responsibilities to honour those rights and protections. Renewing relations and modes of relationality to the land in this way reminds us of our place within Creation, and empowers a communal, ceremonial process of healing, flourishment and resurgence. Such land-centered thinking supports what Anishinaabe scholar John Borrows terms landed citizenship: citizenship rights *for* the earth and citizenship defined by a relationship *with* the earth. Thus, cyclical readings of land and literature may also enable *onkwehonwe* identities to

form in relation to the earth and its networks of extended kinship rather than in relation to blood quantum or nation-states. My own experiences with reading trees next to works of Indigenous narrative art (both pre-dating the dissertation and concurrently) provides evidence for the possibility of such land-based identities.

Once, when I told my life story to Wolf Clan Elder Norma General from the Cayuga Nation, she told me that I have a foot in two different canoes. One of those canoes holds the *onkwehonwe*, their beliefs and culture, and the other, a ship, holds the settler nations and their beliefs and culture. She warned me that it is very hard to straddle these two different vessels and that if I didn't find a way to balance between the two I would likely fall. This metaphor, what I would later come to know as a reference to the *Aterihwahnira:tshera ne Kaswéntah* (Two Row Wampum), aptly describes my experience of feeling drawn in two directions, of feeling I owe loyalty to two different groups of people, and have two different (and often opposing) identities. While at one time this cultural in-betweeness felt like a constant wound, I have come to realize the futility of such binary thinking. I have come to realize that I don't need to choose the canoe or the ship, that if I bring them close enough together in our shared journey down the waters, keeping my balance is possible. Thus, I read trees next to novels, work in both university and Indigenous communities, attend longhouse, belong to the Upper Mohawk band and the Wolf Clan, and live in the city with my non-Indigenous family. This is one of the reasons why the land's message that everything is related is so important. There is only one earth and she is home to us all. By forming my sense of self and belonging in relation to trees and to lands, in relation to place-thought, my vision of the world and my place within it becomes land-centered rather than human-centered. Put differently, my shared kinship with the land allows for a self-determining approach to identity formation that does not force me into categories of authenticity

or assimilation. To return to the Two Row metaphor, sharing kinship with the land makes me think that perhaps it is inaccurate to imagine that anybody fits totally in one vessel, or does not move between them. It seems appropriate, then, that this movement between European ship and onkwehonwe canoe – a balancing act that I perform on a daily basis – informs the methodology of this work.

Aterihwahnira:tshera ne Kaswéntah & Trans-Indigeneity

In each of my chapters I am continuously and intentionally moving across different sources and kinds of knowledge. I read trees and literatures using both the thoughts of the land and literary criticism to guide me, in what I've come to think of as a Two Row/trans-Indigenous methodology. This Two Row methodology of juxtaposition is increasingly important because our vessels are tied together on this river of life. We need to be able to communicate across cultures, painful histories, and, in the present instance, across disciplines – botany (tree studies) and literary studies. We need to communicate across our knowledge systems, especially about the earth because she is our shared matter, and she is in crisis.

Using a braided methodology of Chadwick Allen's trans-Indigeneity, the Two Row Wampum, and tree readings, my project examines three branches of land-centered philosophy within Indigenous literature: embodying cosmologies; spirit and non-human agency; and internalized ecological holism. In *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Studies*, Chadwick Allen offers a methodology that purposefully juxtaposes art and literature from specific local Indigenous nations with that of other global Indigenous communities to explore how this comparative method produces new modes of interpretation and practices of reading across Indigenous difference and diversity. He suggests that as scholars we can acknowledge

Indigenous texts' tribal specificity while also placing them "close together across genre and media, aesthetic systems and worldviews, technologies and practices, tribes and nations, the Indigenous-settler binary, and historical periods and geographical regions" (xviii). While a trans-Indigenous methodology highlights the importance of "remaining always cognizant of the complexity of the relevant Indigenous global" (xix) to the Indigenous local, I also believe that local juxtapositions of Indigenous knowledge, texts, and lifeways offer significant enrichment for reading across material and cognitive borders and conceiving of a shared citizenship with the land. By reading different Indigenous texts through a Rotinonhsonni framework, my trans-Indigenous methodology affirms Indigenous alliances with the environment and with each other, their long-standing presence on and stewardship of the land, and the value and validity of knowledge that is ancestral, adaptive and alive. Allen's trans-Indigenous methodology also reflects Two Row Wampum ideology given its interest in placing difference side-by-side – like the European ship and the onkwehonwe canoe – in order to deepen understanding and generate a shared, critical dialogue. Allen describes trans-Indigeneity as "a methodology of focused *juxtapositions* of distinct Indigenous texts, performances, and contexts. Where *compare* unites 'together' (*com*-) with 'equal' (*par*), *juxtapose* unites 'close together' (Lat. *juxta*-) with 'to place' (Fr. *poser*)" (xvii-xviii). This emphasis on juxtaposition rather than comparison, on placing close together rather than assuming a common equality, also articulates the nation-to-nation relationship laid out in the Two Row Wampum.

A peace agreement made between Europeans and the Rotinonhsonni in the early 17th century, the *Aterihwahnira:tshera Kaswéntah* (Two Row Wampum) features two purple rows of beads – representing a European sailing ship and an *onkwehonwe* canoe – running parallel on a bed of white beads – representing a shared river on which the vessels float. The Dutch and

Rotinonhsonni nations agreed to share the river without interfering in the other's cultural and political distinctiveness. This was especially assured by the *Kaswéntah* space, the three rows of white beads running between the vessels that stand for good words, strength, and peace. In a version of the story that he inherited from Cayuga chief Jacob Thomas, Skarure scholar Richard Hill narrates the Rotinonhsonni nation's explanation of the *Aterihwahnira:tshera Kaswéntah*: "I will put in my canoe my belief and laws. In your vessel you shall put your belief and laws. All my people will be in my canoe, your people in your vessel. We shall put these boats in the water and they shall always be parallel, as long as there is Mother Earth, this will be everlasting" ("Oral Memory" 155). *Aterihwahnira:tshera Kaswéntah* is therefore an expression of *kenten:ron* that says we share this river, this ecology, and as our shared matter the earth is both a reason and means to ensure the continuance of *skén:nen* between our nations and Creation. Therefore, the Two Row is a treaty that negotiates peace based on the earth (the river) as *tsi niyonkwarih:ten* of the Rotinonhsonni and European nations. It is not only a treaty between human nations therefore, but also between humans and the land. Furthermore, while the treaty reinforces the earth as our shared matter and our shared investment, it also says that we need to agree to be different, to not interfere in each other's ways. By articulating an agreement based upon juxtaposition (placing difference close together), rather than comparison (assuming sameness and equality), the Two Row communicates a relationship of respect for autonomy, self-determination, and distinctness, but also for solidarity. I suggest that this is an articulation of a shared belonging to the land, wherein the wampum (*owén:na*) is the medium for the land (*orì:wa*) as the source of solidarity that binds us together (*kenten:ron*) for the protection of universal balance and health (*sken:nen*). The Two Row, therefore, accords well with Allen's notion of Trans-Indigenous juxtaposition.

The trans-Indigenous and Two Row methodology of this dissertation uses Rotinonhsonni cultural frameworks to interpret meaning from within other non-Rotinonhsonni texts. I want to acknowledge that there are risks in this approach of slipping into pan-Indianism. Craig Womack, in *Reasoning Together: A Native Critics Collective*, explains that "the most consistent and damaging critique against Native intellectuals involves labelling them as 'essentialists'" (6). Warning Indigenous writers about the dangers of "making universal claims in ahistorical modes," Womack advises a practice of scrutinizing our own theory and research by asking "what date did it occur? Can you locate it on a map? How is jurisdiction exercised in this particular space?" (7). In short, Womack writes, we want to avoid making "universal, overarching assumptions about Indians," and instead "delve into particulars" (6). While I in no way want to essentialize the many diverse nations of Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, I do think there is value in juxtapositions of land-centered knowledge, and so I do my best to responsibly read literatures and stories from different Indigenous nations side-by-side with Rotinonhsonni ones (a Two Row approach). My thinking on this responsibility reflects Leanne Simpson's when she attests that "Nishnaabeg intelligence compels me to learn, share and embody everything I can from every teacher that presents themselves to me" including, she says, bell hooks and Franz Fanon who "speak to [her] heart as an Nishnaabekwe" ("Land" 16). Others, like Leroy Little Bear, argue that "there is enough similarity among North American Indian philosophies to apply the concepts generally, even though there may be individual differences or differing emphases" (qtd. in Battiste 77). Because my focus is on increasing awareness of *yethinisten:ha onhwéntsia's* communication with us (and all nations are of her), I suggest that there is value in inter-cultural readings; however, as Little Bear specifies, there will be differences or differing emphases depending upon place and nation, and even within places and nations. This is a tension I try to

navigate throughout the project. In places where I have fallen too far to one side, I hope you will recall my anti-essentialist intention and perhaps take me aside to show me where I've taken a misstep.

Reading Trees

In addition to trans-Indigeneity and the Two Row Wampum, the third strand of my braided methodology is reading trees. I read trees in three ways: through oral histories; aesthetically; and through place-thought. Before any research can begin, there must be a relationship between me and the tree I'm attempting to read. If I already have a relationship with a specific tree, the reading process is much more successful. For those who I've never met before, there are additional protocols to follow and the process takes much longer.

I begin by introducing myself, I offer a prayer of thanks and a pinch of tobacco, and explain my intentions. I sit with the tree for as long as physically possible and make many return visits. During each visit I watch carefully and try to observe in the environment around me the different stages of development of that type of tree. Once I feel there is a level of familiarity established, I begin reading the tree aesthetically. Examining its leaves, bark, berries, flowers, growth patterns, and relationship with its environment helps me to create what I think of as metaphoric meaning. I then read the tree through Rotinonhsonni oral history. Many of the stories foundational to our culture feature trees fulfilling special responsibilities. For example, our creation history features *yotsìtsyonte o:se* (Eastern Flowering Dogwood) as the Celestial Tree that must be uprooted in the sky world before cycles of life, death and rebirth can begin on earth. Lastly, I read the tree through place-thought. First Woman's thoughts are real and material. They come from place, extend outward and unfold within all beings in Creation. This Rotinonhsonni epistemology perceives agency in all life, and it means that trees have thoughts and can

communicate them to us. In my attempt to hear tree-thought, I sit with the tree for long periods of time, clear my mind and focus on the breath that passes back and forth between us. I try to slow down my human sense of time, and imagine myself within tree temporality. My consciousness plays a role in place-thought, as I imagine does everyone's, but that is to be expected. Every being in Creation is influenced by the consciousness of First Woman, therefore our own subjectivities are also reflections of her own. When I try to hear tree-thoughts, it's impossible (and not altogether desirable) to say that they are scientifically objective. What I hear, however, is still vitally important, and it still connects me in a real way to the land. It provides me with insight I might not otherwise have realized, and it reinforces the agency of the land and all of its more-than-human societies. Once I complete my research with the tree, I then bundle the teachings (aesthetic, oral and place-thought) to create a theoretical framework for reading a novel that conveys similar land-centered themes. This process of reading is cyclical and interrelational. Often the tree readings that I apply to the literature help deepen my understanding of land-centrism within the novel, but just as often the land-centric concepts within the novel will help develop my ability to read trees.

Why Trees? Why Literature?

The reason I read trees, as distinct from other beings that are part of Creation, is because I have an affinity with trees, a natural closeness that empowers my ability to read them. My land-centered method of coming to know requires close observation and familiarity; the likelihood of receiving place-thought increases depending upon the intimacy of my relationship to place, or in this case, trees (as emplaced beings). Trees are both an independent ecological nation, and an extension of First Woman (as are humans). Tree-thoughts and agency therefore arise from, or are connected to, First Woman's consciousness. This is also true for grasses, berries, animals, water,

winds, and all beings in Creation. The work I do in trying to read the language of trees could therefore also be undertaken with any other nonhuman society. I could attempt to strengthen my relationship with water, for example, and in so doing, develop a process of coming to know the teachings waters have to offer. Again, the reason I focus on trees is because of my long-standing sense of kinship with them. I have come to understand such closeness as the necessary basis for reading the land.

The reason this dissertation uses contemporary Indigenous literature is because of the important role that story (*owén:na*) plays in the cycle of *Kayanerekowa*. Indigenous narrative art is one of many forms of *owén:na* that carries the message of *orì:wa* (our matters), and its accessibility (to wider communities than traditional knowledge reaches, for example) and communitism[19] make it a particularly good carrier. From a Rotinonhsonni perspective, oral and graphic (written) sources of story are equally valid and important. Many Indigenous nations have long traditions of recording histories, stories and teachings through mediums that combine both the oral and graphic.[20] The Rotinonhsonni, for example, have long used wampum beads as mnemonic devices that act as graphic representations of history but are only readable to those few who have studied the belts and know the oral component of the histories that correspond with them.[21] *Wiigwaasabak* (birch bark scrolls) are another example, this time from Anishinaabe tradition. The marks on the scrolls guide memorization of complex ceremonies, histories and stories so they can be passed on to future generations. A last example comes from the Lakota,

[19] Jace Weaver contends that Indigenous literature is "communitist" (a neologism combining community and activism) to "the extent that it has a proactive commitment … to participate in the healing of the grief and sense of exile felt by Native communities and the pained individuals in them" (43).
[20] I borrow the terminology of "the graphic" from Christopher Teuton's *Deep Waters*.
[21] For further reading on wampum use and its importance, see: "Print Culture and Decolonizing the University: Indigenizing the Page: Part 1." *The Future of the Page*. Ed. Peter Stoicheff and Andrew Taylor. UTP, 2004. 111-23; and, Justice, Daniel Heath. "Indigenous Writing." *The World of Indigenous North America.* Ed. Robert Warrior. NY: Routledge, 2014. 291-307.

who used *waniyetu wowapi* (winter counts) to pictographically represent a significant event from each year in their communal history. Rather than a hierarchy that privileges literacy above orality, these examples demonstrate that for many Indigenous nations, both these modes of *owén:na* compliment and strengthen one another. How well the stories represent our thinking or take us into a deeper understanding of our matters is more important than the form that story takes. I have tried to reflect this Indigenous view of knowledge in my citation choices.

Coming to Know is Communal

This project sought the help of, and relies upon the insights of many individuals (scholars, friends, community members, teachers, and family) both Indigenous and settler from the Grand River, McMaster, and Hamilton communities. You will see throughout the dissertation that I make every effort to cite various sources of knowledge, including conversations, emails, and editorial notes. This choice was inspired by Leanne Simpson's citations in *Dancing on our Turtle's Back* and the careful acknowledgement she gives to all sources of knowledge within its pages. It is also inspired by conversations I've had with a committee member, Daniel Coleman, about what he calls the "politics of citation." Simply put, who we choose to cite as sources of "reputable knowledge" entrenches those sources as authorities. I have outlined above that part of the work of this dissertation is to try and destabilize hierarchies that privilege Western canons and knowledge while subjugating and delegitimizing IK. My citations seek to recognize knowledge from all its sources and to demonstrate that coming to know is not done in isolation, but within a community of relationships.

Our Words Matter

My use of terminology (particularly in reference to Indigenous nations) and *onkwehonwe* language in this project carry similar political implications to my citation choices, and so also necessitate some explanation. Because there are tensions with using terms such as *First Nations* (which excludes Metis and Inuit), this dissertation uses the term *Indigenous* to refer to the First Peoples of Turtle Island. While *Indigenous* does not carry the negative connotations of a term like *Aboriginal*, it is not a perfect term either. Some suggest that the label *Indigenous* continues to exclude the Metis Nation, and others point to the term as too broadly international in scope; however, *Indigenous* does have positive associations with self-determination and human rights more generally (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, for example) and is related to terms of cultural resilience and pride, such as *Indigeneity*. The word *indigenous* also denotes an original belonging to place, which I see as empowering to Indigenous peoples' land claims. Given these complexities, I make every effort to use Indigenous peoples' own names for themselves whenever possible. I believe that asserting our own names in our own languages is a small act of refusal of settler domination and continued attempts at our assimilation. Furthermore, after consulting with my supervisor, Rick Monture, I have decided to use the phrase "settler capitalism" to refer to forces in the world that do not care about our Mother, or the peace and well-being of fellow human-beings, but primarily about making money and power. As such, my critique of settler capitalism as a "predatory economy" incompatible with the "deep reciprocity" of many Indigenous peoples' land-based relationships echoes Glen Coulthard's assertion in *Unsettling America* that "for Indigenous nations to live, capitalism must die. And for capitalism to die, we must actively participate in the construction of Indigenous alternatives to it."

This project also uses onkwehonwe language (especially Kanien'keha as that is the language of my heritage) wherever possible because recovery and use of our Indigenous languages is the only way to truly "think Indian" as Sotsisowah would say.[22] The language also offers entry into knowledge that could not be found anywhere else. As Kanien'keha is a polysynthetic language, it can be broken apart into its morphemes to express literal translations that carry a wealth of information about *onkwehonweneha*. In the places where I perform such linguistic breakdown, I want readers to know that I could not do so without the help of my Kanien'keha teachers Tehahenteh (Frank Miller) and Tehota'kerá:tonh (Jeremy Green).

Letting Trees Lead the Way

Each chapter in this dissertation is prefaced by an introduction that features autobiographical, experiential learning from trees. The oral histories, aesthetic interpretations, and place-thought knowledge that lands on me from the trees then leads my reading of novels by contemporary Indigenous authors. My choice to write each chapter in two parts (tree and literary readings) arises out of an organizational necessity and a methodological one. This project is fed by many threads of knowledge and information that arise from a diversity of fields, such as Indigenous, Cultural, Literary, and Environmental studies. It also weaves direct, experiential learning from trees into practices of critically reading Indigenous fiction. Therefore, to ensure that you, reader, have a way in to the thinking that guides my analysis of each tree and of each work of literature, I do not assume experience with these fields of study; instead, I try to establish a common base of knowledge. Thus, each chapter begins with a tree prologue that aims to identify the place-thoughts, oral histories, cultural teachings and principles that are at play in

[22] For ease of reading, I have provided a glossary at the end of this project for those who need reminders about meaning.

each subsequent literary section of the chapter. My advice to you reader (and my intent in creating this sectioned structure) is to mirror my own analytic process by carrying the prologue teachings with you in your mind as you read the literary sections.

Beginning in chapter one with *yotsìtsyonte o:se's* teachings about the cycle of life, death, and rebirth, I examine how Omi, the protagonist in Hogan's novel, *Power* (1999), is reborn through enacting her people's creation history. In this first chapter, I offer "being your own creation story" as a land-centered teaching that connects us bodily to the earth and enacts *entsitewatahkhwennyon:ko*, meaning "we will go back on their tracks" or "we will do something in the way that our grandparents used to." My second chapter pairs *onen'takwenhten:sera* (redcedar) alongside Xa'isla-Heiltsuk writer Eden Robinson's novel *Monkey Beach* (2000).[23] Taking up *onen'takwenhten:sera's* insights about cleansing grief, I use Xa'isla concepts of *nu'yem* (comparable to the idea of *ka'nikonhrí:yo* in a Rotinonhsonni context), and *nakwelagila* (a ritual cleansing in water) to argue that both Robinson and her character Lisamarie, perform a (re)mapping of traditional Xa'isla territories (*wa'waises*). This (re)mapping acts as a form of condolence for the suffering inflicted upon the Xa'isla by colonization of their lands, bodies, minds, and spirits. In the third and final chapter, I apply *wahta's* message about ecological holism and balance – in part conveyed through a foretelling from the *Kariwi:io* (Code of Handsome Lake) that prophesies the dire consequences of climate change – to read Thomas King's novel *Truth and Bright Water* (1999). Placed in conversation with one another, these sources of knowledge challenge borders constructed by humans by emphasizing the fluidity of the land. This teaching about ecological kinship reminds us that the earth is our shared matter, and that binaries of "authentically" traditional or assimilated Indigenous identity and lifestyle are

[23] I follow the lead of dendrologists in using the compound term, "redcedar."

destructive both to ourselves and to our Mother. Delving more deeply into *Aterihwahnira:tshera Kaswéntah*, this chapter discusses the possibility of maintaining balance in moving between the *onkwehonwe* canoe and European ship. In each of these chapters I seek to emphasize the realness both of intelligence arising from the land and nonhumans, and of the far-reaching consequences of denying the personhood of First Woman and so the respect, proper treatment, and protections to which she is entitled. It is my conviction that false perceptions of humans as outside of, separate from, or superior to nature have been pivotal in the dispossession of Indigenous peoples' lands and rights, and in the environmental destruction that currently poses a serious threat to future generations of all humans. It is with great hope then, that I turn to the power of story, of *owén:na*, to recall us to one another and unite our minds in remembering *yethinisten:ha onhwéntsia* as our shared mother-matter during this precarious moment in human and ecological history.

Chapter One

Linda Hogan's *Power* and Eastern Flowering Dogwood

PART 1 ~ *Yotsìtsyonte O:se* and Lessons of the Creation History

In the tree-reading section of this chapter, I explore how, as a symbol in the Rotinonhsonni creation history, *yotsìtsyonte o:se* teaches us about the necessity and beauty of cycles of life, death, and rebirth. Reinforced through aesthetic and place-thought readings, yotsìtsyonte o:se's instruction leads me into an understanding of our epic teachings as both dynamic and precise.[24] As Theresa McCarthy explains, "Haudenosaunee tradition is Indigenous knowledge. As such, it is a process of collective mediation of the seemingly oppositional attributes of continuity, consistency, precision with dynamic and evolving adaptability, and potential" (McCarthy 18). Referring to *onkwehonweneha* as dynamic is "not meant to exclude that our people are also meticulous about it. It is the combination of the dynamic and the meticulous that ensures continuity and survival" (McCarthy 17). Our epic teachings are not meant to be (nor could they be) put behind glass to keep them static or "pure." They are living stories that find their life source in the *onkwehonwe* who take up the stories and interpret their meaning within the context of their everyday lives. What our epic teachings tell us about being *onkwehonwe* then, is that we are not static or pure, either. As such, I argue that imagining ourselves within the creation history, and enacting its sociocritical teachings, dislodges

[24] I follow Theresa McCarthy's lead in using the phrase "epic teachings," to refer to the teachings of Rotinonhsonni cultural history: the creation history, the four ceremonies, the formation of the clan system, *Kayanerekowa*, and *Kariwi:io* (McCarthy 130).

internalized colonialism to make room for Indigenous self-determined identities and practices of belonging. This chapter places *yotsitsyonte o:se* and Linda Hogan's novel, *Power,* into conversation because both tell stories of re-creation, and both tree and novel offer representations of adaptability as a marker of resilience and flourishment. Reading these texts across from one another offers a deeper understanding of how transformation (birth, death, and rebirth) represented in and by Rotinonhsonni and Seminole[25] cosmologies ensures cultural continuity while allowing for social change.

* * * *

I park the car at the end of a long, winding drive beside a white house with a child's plastic slide on the front lawn and a hockey net in the driveway. I check the directions that Nigel Finney sent me, making sure that I'm in the right place. I awkwardly climb out of the car, putting my feet out first before swinging my pregnant belly around and from beneath the steering wheel. Approaching a metal gate, I see a Bruce Trail sign hidden behind a grapevine that indicates I'm entering the Waterdown Rd. Side Trail. Surprised at the existence of a trail that I didn't know about, I squeeze between the gate and bushy growth and feel the heady anticipation of finally meeting *yotsìtsyonte o:se* (Eastern Flowering Dogwood). Before long I'm confronted with a decision: I can take the trail that continues straight and flat before me, or veer right down a steep embankment and a set of old, shoddy stairs that have been mostly reclaimed by the mud and clay of the escarpment. Remembering that *yotsìtsyonte o:se* enjoys growing on an incline, I take the road less traveled. The trail switches back on itself several times, and I'm beginning to think I've made a mistake when I spot a small tree a few feet off the side of the trail with a blue ribbon (indicative of endangered status) around its narrow trunk. Excitedly I check its leaves, and yes!

[25] Though Hogan is Chickasaw, she writes from the perspective of the Taiga nation, which appears to be a fictionalization of the Seminoles of Florida.

They are simple, opposite, ovate, elliptic to broadly oval and the venation is pinnate and bowed. To be sure, I check the bark: alligator skin. This is definitely an Eastern flowering dogwood.[26] I've come prepared. Slowly lowering myself to the ground I sit beneath *o:se's* tiered canopy and introduce myself.

"*She:kon yotsìtsyonte o:se*, Kaitlin *yonkya'ts. Konkwe:honwe. Oh niyotonhatye*?"

We make small talk for a time, and then I get down to business. Pulling out a small leather pouch, I use my left hand (because it's closest to my heart) to take out a small pinch of tobacco that I grew in my mother's garden and offer it to *yotsìtsyonte o:se* as I speak the words of *Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen*. Pulling deep from within myself the good energies that I want to give back to Creation, and on this day, particularly to *karharonnion* (trees of the forest), I use them to empower the words that I offer in reciprocity. I contemplate for a few moments the responsibility I am fulfilling by speaking these words. I am trying to honour the original instructions given to *onkwehonwe* by Shonkwaia'tishon, but sometimes it just doesn't seem like enough. As I sit there with *o:se*, running my hands along her trunk and gently brushing her leaves I'm struck by an acute sadness. In our exchange of emails, Nigel told me that the reason I couldn't easily find a non-planted Eastern flowering dogwood is because they are endangered. A dogwood specialist working with Conservation Halton, Nigel has been tracking the spread of dogwood anthracnose, an "exotic fungal disease endangering the species." He also explained how clear cutting for agriculture has limited the Carolinian forests that dogwood trees call home. I know from the map he sent me that this particular dogwood is joined by only three or four others in the area. Not particularly clear on whether the sadness I feel is my own or *o:se's*, I

[26] This particular dogwood tree is located along the Grindstone Creek in Waterdown, in an area that used to be called Smokey Hollow. Prior to settler invasion, the area was inhabited by the Chonnonton Nation, and then the Rotinonhsonni took over the territory circa 1650.

bring out my smudging materials. Striking a match I let the curled edges of the sage catch fire before using my own curled hand to waft the smoke over *yotsìtsyonte o:se's* body. I bathe her from the base of her trunk to the highest leaves I can reach, then guide the smoke over my own face before settling the abalone shell in a muddy hollow in the ground where the smoke can eddy unguided until the leaves burn out. I sit there with her for a few hours, until my legs go numb.

My next visit with *yotsìtsyonte o:se* is in late September. Settling myself in for a lengthy visit, I look up, hoping to see her red berries. I've either missed the flowering of her bracts (white petals that look like flowers) or she has decided not to flower this season in the hopes of optimizing her reproductive chances. There are no berries for me to see either, none on the tree or on the ground. This notable absence makes me think of a planted, cultivar dogwood I discovered on Victoria Street in Dundas, close to where I live. When I spotted the cultivar a few weeks ago, it was barely taller than I am and its crown was dense and pruned into an oval shape. Its bracts were flowering white. Each of the four petals felt like a thick, slightly rubbery, but soft, leaf. Recalling this encounter now, as I sit beneath *yotsìtsyonte o:se's* sparse canopy, makes me wonder about the kinds of resources available to each of these trees who are from the same family but have very different experiences of place, human intervention, and rootedness. The cultivar came from a nursery and has presumably never lived in a forest or been connected (rooted) to other dogwood trees. As it stood alone in a very generous front yard this tree had ample access to sunlight and was clearly watered as part of a garden. With this abundance of resource, it's no wonder that it had the energy to bloom (sadly, I doubt that any offspring it managed to produce will be allowed to grow, as they will likely face the blade of a lawnmower before long). The tree under which I sit, however, is connected to the intricate root and fungi systems of the forest. Presumably, this tree could even be connected underground to the other

dogwoods in the area, which are not too far distant. This tree has to compete with the abundant maples towering over its head for sunlight, water and other resources. While clearly it has flowered before – based off the many baby dogwoods carpeting the forest floor nearby – this year it seems to be preserving its energy rather than reproducing. So the cultivar, isolated and alone, had resources to spare, but the non-planted dogwood, who has many neighbours and is part of the complex network of the forest, has to ration. I meditate on this for a while, making obvious connections to my own conflicting experiences of Indigeneity. As a Kanien'keha:ka woman raised in the city by white parents, married to a white man, estranged from my birth family and from much of my cultural knowledge, was I, like the planted dogwood, somehow less Indigenous? Is the cultivar less of a dogwood than the non-planted species?

O:se and I continue to visit with one another into the autumn, and after months of visits I begin to have expectations that she will start to communicate something to me. Sitting on the hard ground in late October, while 23 weeks pregnant, I feel uncomfortable and annoyed that I haven't figured out *os:e's* "secrets." I offer her my precious energy and she doesn't seem to be giving me anything. I try to experience her tree thoughts but am frustrated by the lack of any clear message. Knowing that this is not a good attitude for fostering landed relationships, I get up and hike through the forest, hoping to recover some patience and gratitude. Inching my way down the side of the escarpment to the stream below, I stand in the cold water and let the wonder of the forest clear my mind so that good thinking can return to me. I close my eyes, slow my breathing, and stand facing the sunlight, imagining its light filling me from the bottom of my toes to the crown of my head. And then it hit me. Why should I assume that trees can be read individually without any context? That's like assuming that meaning can be derived from a single letter of the alphabet without the context of the rest of the word or sentence. *O:se* should

be read through her relationships with the rest of the forest, through her interactions with place. I spend the rest of the day hiking around the area, paying close attention to both the smallest details and grandest impressions of the forest while holding *o:se's* image in my mind. After several hours of this, I sit down to rest and am starting to feel drowsy when the little life growing inside of me gives a swift kick (as she is wont to do whenever I try to sleep!). I chuckle to myself and hold my hand over the spot where I imagine her foot might reappear, and can't help but think of the upcoming birth. I am both scared and excited at the prospect of bringing life into the world, of becoming a mother. I am planning a water birth at home with the help of midwives and give a silent prayer to my ancestors that they protect my baby and me when our time comes. Reflecting on my daughter's upcoming journey, I suddenly realize that my body is to become the site of the creation history, that my body IS the creation history. My baby will travel from the spirit world through my birth canal into this new world where she will be caught mid-air (by hands rather than wings) and delivered safely onto the body of her mother. I smile with this new awareness, and thank o:se for helping this knowledge land on me. With a new sense of direction from o:se herself, I explore the possibility of coming to know by inserting myself within the creation history. Immersing my learning about *yotsìtsyonte o:se* within the creation history, in turn, guides me in attending to our cosmology's representation of trees and plants as medicines provided for our well-being. In fact, the first medicine Shonkwaia'tishon created in our world was *o'seranekwénhtonh* (red willow; red osier). Interestingly, in English, this first medicine is often referred to as red osier dogwood. To me, this suggests a connection between the Celestial Tree (referred to by some as a dogwood) uprooted in the sky world, and the first medicine created on earth. The creation history then, is key in reminding us of our relationships to plants

and trees, and speaks directly about the role of *yotsìtsyonte o:se* both in the sky world and on earth.

Rotinonhsonni Creation History[27]

My father's death was unlike anything that's ever happened here before. It changed things. I don't have the words yet to explain how, but everything is different. My body and mind are filled with a tired heaviness, and I visit him often in the tree where his body lies. He has told me that changes are coming for my life, too. I will no longer be alone; I am to join with the Keeper of the Tree. I can see the lights of the Celestial Tree from here, and am grateful for the gifts that she shares with us. Her blossoms light our world, her fruit feeds us, her bark provides us with medicines and when her leafy branches dance in the wind my heart becomes light and warm. If the Keeper is anything like the Tree he protects, our life together will be a happy, joyful one.

My mother has sent me to the Keeper with a basket of bread to formally recognize the joining of our lives. The Keeper was pleased, but asked me to perform tasks that I did not understand. It is good that my father prepared me for what was to come, because otherwise I might have refused. When I cooked the acorn mush and it splashed on my naked body, the burns were so painful, but I knew I could accept the pain and continue my preparations. My mother taught me that it is important to keep a good mind while cooking because all our energies go into

[27] Following the lead of Kahente Horn-Miller, I include here my own telling of the creation history from the first person perspective of Atsi'tsiaka:yon; however, this perspective is also mine. Leanne Simpson explains that "reclaiming the context" of our cosmologies means that "rather than saying or thinking that Gzhwe Mnidoo [Creator] lowered an abstract 'first person' to the earth" we should say or think that it was "not just any 'First Person,' but that it was me, or you" (Dancing 41). The creation history I share here is largely informed by Sotsisowah's *Myth of the Earthgrasper*, but is in effect, an amalgamation of many written, oral, and academic portrayals of Rotinonhsonni cosmology. For further analysis – which space does not allow for here – see the dissertations of: Kevin White, "Haudenosaunee Worldviews through Iroquoian Cosmologies: The Published Narratives in Historical Context;" Amber Adams, "Teyotsi'tsiahsonhátye: Meaning and Medicine in The Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Story of Life's Renewal;" and Kahente Horn-Miller, "Sky Woman's Great Granddaughters: A Narrative Inquiry into Kanienkehaka Women's Identity."

the food. It is our responsibility to prepare food for our families so they can have good minds and strong bodies to fulfill their responsibilities for the rest of us. I knew I could withstand the pain when it was for my family. When the Keeper's dogs licked the mush off my body, the roughness of their tongues abraded my burns, but I knew they were trying to clean my wounds and help me heal and so I accepted their gift even though it hurt. I couldn't get angry at them or push them away, they were trying their best to care for me. When the Keeper asked me not to speak to anyone, I thought this strange, until I realized that remaining silent allowed me to listen. I had been separated from everyone but my mother for so long that it was good for me to listen and observe the community, the people, and the goings on around Keeper's home so that I could learn how things worked and how I might fit in and contribute. When we decided that we wanted to join our bodies, Keeper and I laid down together with the soles of our feet touching. As inverse images of each other, my energy traveled into his body, and his energy moved into mine, connecting us in a circle. I knew with the rising of the sun that I was pregnant, and felt a peace inside myself that had been missing since my father died.

Keeper cannot sleep, he cannot eat, he is troubled by dreams that leave him confused and anxious when he wakes. He has called everyone together for a feast to try and help him interpret his dream. Finally, Fire Dragon (Comet) gave us some insight.[28] We must uproot the Celestial Tree! Keeper says it is his dreamwish, he knew it as soon as Fire Dragon spoke the words. The whole village is gathering this afternoon to uproot the Tree. We must all work together so that the roots remain intact, we do not want to hurt her. I don't know how much I will be able to contribute, since I can tell that my baby's time is almost here. As we uproot the Tree, I notice

[28] In Jesse Cornplanter's version of the creation history, Fire Dragon is also called Blue Panther. This is an interesting coincidence considering the important role that Panther plays in the Seminole creation history, which proves an important narrative for interpreting Hogan's novel, discussed below.

other plants come free from the ground as well. Strawberries, tobacco, and yellow dogtooth violet all cling to the earth between the Celestial Tree's roots as we tip her over. When it is done, Keeper sends everyone away and, tired, lies down to rest beside the enormous hole left by Tree's absence. Worried for him, I come to sit beside him and the hole. Holding my hand, he strokes my hair and the side of my face. Moving his hand to my belly, he cups the place where our child rests. I can feel the love move between the three of us and smile. Then I notice Keeper is crying. What is wrong my love? I ask him. Haven't we fulfilled your dreamwish? Are you not now at peace? Looking up at me he shakes his head sadly, the tears tracking silently down his face. With surprisingly quick movements, he scoops my pregnant body up into his arms and hugs me to his chest. Startled by his behaviour, I try to push back against his body so I can see his face, but suddenly he drops me and I am falling.

I am overcome by intense fear and panic as I try to figure out what is happening. I am falling. Acting on instinct, my arms and hands grasp desperately at anything that might save me. My fingers claw at earth, and roots tangle themselves in my hair, around my arms and in my clutching hands. I can't breathe. It's dark and I can't see what's happening. Suddenly I sense the air open around me and I can no longer feel the damp, dense closeness of the earth's pressure. I am free-falling in cold air now, plummeting so fast that the air hurts me, ripping at my body and piercing my ears. Darkness takes me.

When I wake my whole body aches, but I'm not falling any longer. Feathered bodies shift beneath me. Working together and moving as one, a giant flock of geese has caught me in a blanket made of wings and strong necks. Looking around I see that what I assumed was ground beneath us, is in fact an endless expanse of water. In all that water, I can make out the geese's destination. As we approach the small island and it cranes its neck around to look at me, I realize

I'm being lowered to the back of a giant sea turtle. Taking my cue, I lower my feet to turtle's shell and my body, in shock, collapses in exhaustion. I sleep again.

Murmuring voices wake me. I open my eyes and see water animals huddled close by in an animated discussion. Beaver, loon, otter, muskrat, and turtle notice I'm awake and ask how I am. How am I? I look down at my body, in one piece, and am stunned that I am, in fact, okay. I am just about to share this with them when the first pressures of labour begin. Suddenly panicked again, I look around me for somewhere safe to have my baby. How can we help, the animals ask? I need earth, I say. Some ground to support and hold me so I can have my baby. After quickly conferring, the animals agree that they know of some earth at the bottom of this great sea. One by one they dive down into the black, choppy waters in search of the bottom. One by one they return exhausted, out of breath and unsuccessful. Finally, muskrat says he will try and the other animals laugh at him. They do not believe a small, unspecial animal like muskrat could succeed where they did not. Not taking to heart the other animal's comments, muskrat dives into the waters. Hours pass and he does not return. Deeply worried for his safety, the other animals and I start to make a plan for his rescue, when muskrat's body floats to the surface. Reaching down, I cup poor muskrat's soft, limp body in my hands and lay him on turtle's back. I sob quietly over his lifeless form, and gently pet his wet, still belly. Reaching for his little paw, I notice something desperately clutched there. Uncurling muskrat's tiny fingers, I find a handful of mud. He did it. It cost him his life, but muskrat brought me earth. Deeply moved and grateful for his sacrifice, the animals and I speak of his bravery, his dedication and his selflessness. Then, because the labour pains are quickly intensifying, I stand and place the mud on turtle's back. Singing the song taught to me by my mother and by her mother before that, I dance in a circle around the earth. I can feel my baby moving downward through my body and toward air, and I

dance faster. As I dance the earth grows wider and farther, eventually covering turtle entirely and then continuing to expand even beyond that. I lower myself closer to the earth I've just created and let the waves of my body lead the way as I push my baby out into the world. I catch her myself and lie her in a soft gathering of grass as I cut the cord with my teeth, then birth and bury the placenta. I understand only too well her cries of shock and uncertainty at coming from one world into another. Putting her to my breast I hold her tight, letting the sound of my heartbeat calm her with familiarity. She is the First Woman born to this place.

My daughter, Tekawerahkwa (Breath of the Wind) grows quickly and is soon a young woman. She is the light of my heart. Taking care of her has helped to lift the grief of losing my family. One day while she walks the shores of Turtle Island, Tekawerahkwa meets a man who asks if they can be joined. She comes to ask my opinion, and I am pleased with the match. The man is actually the powerful being, West Wind. He places two arrows on my daughter's belly and in the morning she is pregnant. All through her pregnancy, we can hear the voices of her two unborn sons arguing within her.

Soon my daughter's labour begins. I catch her first son as he emerges into this new world and hand him quickly to Tekawerahkwa while I prepare to catch his twin. But I can tell something is wrong. Tekawerahkwa groans in a most unnatural way. I am scared for her. I take her first son and lie him in the moss. I hold her hand, hoping to offer some comfort. Suddenly, an opening appears beneath her arm and I feel the life leave her body as her second son emerges into this world through her side. My girl! My sweet daughter! You have gone from me. Grief overtakes me, again. It is awhile, too long, before I call myself back to the twins who are now my responsibility. They lie together on the moss. "Which one of you has done this!" I ask. The boy lying to the left who has a sharp ridge running from the crown of his head to the nape of his neck

responds, “it was my brother, Grandmother, he is the one who has done this thing.” And though I know it is not right, I feel the anger and grief rise up in me and looking sharply at the other twin, I know I can never love him as I should. I name the boy with the ridge, Flint, and his twin Sapling. Flint is my only consolation. Slowly, I bury the body of my daughter in the earth that muskrat gifted me so long ago for her birth. Her body and the seeds that came with me from sky world grow here now and provide us with food and medicines.

Like their mother, the boys grow quickly. Sapling, who has moved apart from his brother and me, is good at making things. He has made animals and plants and medicines that remind me of the sky world. The sunflower, red willow, and bluebird were the first to appear. I am beginning to think that perhaps I was wrong about him. Flint tries to be like his brother but he has an impatient nature, and is easily frustrated so his creations turn out, well … different. While we can smell the good food that Sapling has created, Flint’s plants make us sick and so we are often hungry.

Flint and I go to visit Sapling to ensure he shares his food with us. I am so hungry that I demand he give me some of what he was cooking right away, but he refuses. I feel the old anger and grief rise up in me and decide to teach him a lesson: I throw ash on his food to ruin it. If he won’t feed me, he won’t have food for himself either. Besides, Flint has started bringing meat home. At first he said it was too difficult to hunt the animals Sapling created, but the clever boy has trapped them all in a cave so now we eat meat whenever we want.

Sapling has freed the animals from the cave. They were quite angry and upset, and I tried to apologize to them, but something strange has happened, they no longer want to be near me. They fear me. This doesn’t seem right. I want to ask Sapling about it, but after the way I’ve treated him, I doubt he will want to talk with me.

My grandson Sapling says he will make human beings. Flint and I watch him as he takes the earth of his Mother and moulds it into a form like ours. Then, he inhales deeply and exhales into the clay form long and slow. He repeats this twice, and on the third breath the being in his hands comes to life! Sapling tells these *onkwehonwe* that they are to take care of his Creations, that they are to live in harmony and balance with all things and give thanks for the gifts that the Creation shares with them for their good living. The animals, here long before *onkwehonwe,* are to be their teachers. This reminds me of the teachings my mother gave me in the sky world. I had forgotten these words, but recalling them now makes me feel a little lighter.

Since the creation of the *onkwehonwe,* I am trying to help Flint understand the teachings of our people, but impatience and temper rule his heart. Sapling is concerned that Flint may be a threat to his *onkwehonwe* children, so he has challenged him to a duel. Sapling outmatches his brother by using deer antler against him, and sends him to a place between worlds. He is now only to come out at night and when the cold season comes to the earth.

Now that the boys are grown, and have resolved their differences, I feel called to be with my daughter once more. I apologize to Sapling for my behaviour and try to explain that the deep sadness in my heart confuses me and twists my thinking. He seems to understand this and accepts my apology. I ask him to help me become a caretaker for this world and agreeing readily, he helps me into the sky. From here I watch over both my grandsons and join in a cosmic dance with my daughter. My face shines down every night as I help my daughter refresh her body by guiding the tides of the oceans, and I help *yakonkwe* (womankind) to cleanse their bodies also. From up here in the sky, it is my special joy to watch my great-great-granddaughters bring new life into the world, and to give thanks that I am reunited with my own baby girl.

* * * *

Lessons of the Creation History & *Yotsìtsyonte O:se*

In the sky world, the Keeper of the Celestial Tree has a dream and while the dream remains unrealized, he suffers. I suggest that this dreamwish[29], to uproot the Tree, is an example of place-thought. It was knowledge that came to the Keeper possibly from the Tree itself. And it took an entire village to interpret the message. This is an important lesson for me, as I've realized that I may need help in interpreting the messages of the trees that I visit. In other words, Indigenous research is often not a solitary venture, but a communal effort. Fire Dragon (Comet) is the one to interpret the meaning of the Keeper's dreamwish, displaying one of the history's earliest examples of nonhuman agency. Comet is not simply anthropomorphized, but a real being whose cognitive ability, spiritual awareness, and intuition surpasses the human-like beings in the sky world. This is a trend that continues throughout the story. Animals and other nonhuman beings are shown to have special abilities, skills and gifts that humans need, depend upon, and learn from. The Celestial Tree herself has agency and power.

Though various versions of the creation history offer differing accounts of the Celestial Tree, consistent descriptors seem to be that her blossoms light the sky world, her fruit feeds the community and she is immense. In her engagement with the J.N.B. Hewitt version of the History, Amber Adams relays that as "no human beings can know the celestial tree's precise species" it has led "various storytellers to identify it as wild cherry, and dogwood" (104). While the *yotsìtsyonte o:se* of our world is not known for its great height, Adams argues that the

[29] According to Rick Hill, a Dream Wish is a longing of our soul that must be addressed if we are to live a happy life. The Old Man's wish was to have a great feast, uproot the "tree" and start a process of creation and recreation in the world below.

Celestial Tree may represent a "supernaturally tall specimen of one of these species, indicative of its outstanding importance as the prime source of light in Skyworld and, ultimately, the portal through which life comes to the unborn Earth below" (104). Further complicating interpretation of the tree's possible species is Sotsisowah's linguistic interpretation of the Onöñda'gega' version of the creation history. The Onöñda'gega' name for the tree, *ono'dja*, meaning "the tooth," led Sotsisowah to believe the Celestial Tree was actually the yellow dogtooth violet. Rick Hill offers helpful context for reconciling differing representations of the Celestial Tree:

> As it turns out the Tooth is one of several medicine plants that was used by our ancestors to prevent pregnancy. However, there is great risk to the women who use this plant. She could lose her ability to ever get pregnant. That would go against the gift of womanhood – to bare [*sic*] children. … To me, it seems that the Old Man [the Keeper of the Tree] was trying to keep people from using this plant because he wanted life to continue. ("Gëönda'shö'oh" 1-2)

While a comprehensive comparison of the Tree's representation in each version of the creation history is beyond the scope of the present project, what is clear is that *yotsìtsyonte o:se* and *ono'dja* are symbols of life and death. If *ono'dja* is a contraceptive, abortive and sterilizer, then it has powerful medicine capable of influencing women's life-giving powers; thus, it is associated with both birth and death. *Yotsìtsyonte o:se* also represents life, death and rebirth not only because it endures that very cycle (first it thrives, then it is uprooted, and finally it is replanted), but also because it acts as the passage to earth where Atsi'tsiaka:yon begins a new cycle of life, death and rebirth. This theme continues throughout the history. When her father (or uncle depending on the version) dies, Atsi'tsiaka:yon is stricken by grief until she is impregnated by the Keeper (death, birth). While the Celestial Tree is uprooted (death), it is done in a way that protects its roots so it can be replanted (rebirth), and, according to Hill, the dogtooth violet (a

contraceptive or sterilizer) is also uprooted in this process (birth). The result is that a way opens for Atsi'tsiaka:yon to journey to the world below and start a cycle of life, death and rebirth there. Muskrat sacrifices himself to retrieve mud from the bottom of the ocean (death), but Atsi'tsiaka:yon turns the mud into the regenerative earth (birth/rebirth). She then brings her daughter into this new world (birth), who grows quickly and is impregnated by the West Wind (birth). While Tekawerahkwa dies in childbirth (death), she gives birth to twin sons and her body becomes Mother Earth (birth and rebirth). The twins' creations are likewise connected by cycles of life and death. Where Sapling makes deer, Flint makes wolves. Sapling makes medicinal plants, and Flint makes identical looking plants that cause death. Sapling creates sunlight and warmth; Flint brings darkness and frost. To me, these cycles of birth, death, and rebirth teach us "one of the story's most profound messages: on Earth, renewing life requires accepting death" (Adams 116).

A prime example of this cycle of life, death and rebirth is the moment when Atsi'tsiaka:yon travels from the sky world to the world of water below, our world. Some versions of the history claim that she was pushed by the Keeper, some say she willingly jumps and others that she accidently falls. I suggest that The Keeper knew from his dreams (from the place-thought of the Celestial Tree) that to start a new cycle of life, death and rebirth in the world, he needed to sacrifice his wife and unborn child. Either he pushes her so she doesn't have time to be afraid or refuse to go, or he explains and she jumps willingly, but it is necessary for her and her baby to make the journey so life can continue, so the world can be reborn. So while his actions may seem like a betrayal, and to Atsi'tsiaka:yon may in fact have been a betrayal, I think he realized that this sacrifice was necessary for new life to begin. While this must have been traumatic for Atsi'tsiaka:yon, I imagine it cost Keeper, too, as he loses his family.

Muskrat also sacrifices himself in the name of new life. His dive for earth is motivated by Atsi'tsiaka:yon's arrival and the needs of the new life inside of her. He dives down into dark waters, not knowing what's going to happen to him, unsure if he can succeed. Swimming blindly into increasingly cold and dangerous depths, his lungs burning with the need for air, alone and growing weaker and weaker, muskrat keeps going. He does not save anything for the trip back. He knows already that this is his death. Just when he feels himself losing consciousness, just when panic is at its most intense and he thinks, I've failed, I've killed myself and for nothing, he hits bottom. He can only just barely move his oxygen starved muscles to reach out and grasp that mud, and then he's gone. He's not there to see his body float back up to the surface. He's not there to see Atsi'tsiaka:yon find the mud and cry in gratitude for his sacrifice. He's not there to see the mud become Turtle Island, and he's not there for the birth of Tekawerahkwa. Millennia later, muskrat's sacrifice is still resonating. His story teaches us to be brave and selfless, to think not of ourselves but of future generations, to dive downwards into the unknown in search of that which will be fertile ground for new life to grow. We may not see the outcome of our hard work, of the mud that we pull up, those lost generations of Indigenous knowledge, life- and thoughtways, but we can trust that it will change the world. Our search, our research, will bring up our languages, our ceremonies, our philosophies and our relationships with Creation one handful of mud at a time. But it's important to remember – as the cycles of life, death and rebirth in the story teach us – that renewing life requires accepting death; our cultures are not static, they are adaptive and transformative.

When I was pregnant and sitting beneath *yotsìtsyonte o:se's* canopy, I realized that going off birth control was an uprooting of *ono'dja*, that my unborn daughter was in that spirit world and would travel through my body like Atsi'tsiaka:yon traveled through the hole in the sky

dome. She moved downwards through a dark tunnel, was caught in midair, and placed on the body of her mother. This re-enactment made the creation history real for me, and it made Indigenous knowledge embodied. I was connected bodily to the earth because the sacred waters that nourished and protected Wren, that released during labour to wash the doorway clean for her entrance into our world, were also the sacred waters of my Mother. Wren's birth also connected me to my *onkwehonwe* ancestors (none of whom I know), as I realized that my birth mother and her mother before her went through the same journey, the same transformation. I don't know my birth story because my birth was a secret, and I was adopted out of the community, but giving birth to Wren allowed me to relive my own birth and it gave me a sense of origins. Giving birth in this context made me part of the world, a direct actor in its creation. It disallowed passive individualism. When I gave birth to Wren, a piece of me literally came away and I was transformed from a perspective of self centeredness to many-centeredness. There is now in the world a being who needs me to survive, who depends on me utterly. This, I realized, was the relationship I have with Mother Earth. I depend upon her utterly and could not survive without her constant care and generosity. I now know her love for me in a way I could never have before I had a daughter. I now know that though I am a walking, talking being with an agency that enables me to make my own decisions and effect my environment, I am always one with and a piece of Mother Earth. In the same way that I am connected to Wren, because she carries in her my love, my energy, my blood, breath and heartbeat, we are connected to the earth and to all the ancestors that have come before us and who are now returned to that earth.

As I understand it, this awareness of my interconnection with ancestors and land exemplifies what Leanne Simpson describes as resurgence. The Seventh Fire Prophecy of the Anishinaabe, Simpson relates, says that there will come a time "when the most oppressive parts

of the colonial regime would loosen and the Nishnaabeg people would be able to pick up the pieces of their language, culture and thought-ways and begin to build, in essence, a resurgence." This resurgence depended upon Nishnaabeg ancestors who hid scrolls, took ceremony underground, passed stories secretly to children, and held onto the language. Just as Atsi'tsiaka:yon brings seeds with her from the sky world that grow from her daughter's buried body, Nishnaabeg ancestors enacted seventh-generation thinking and "planted the seeds of resurgence, just as Gzhwe Mnidoo [Creator] planted the seeds of life." Therefore, Simpson explains, "resistance and resurgence are not only our response to colonialism, they are our only responsibility in the face of colonialism. Resurgence is our original instruction" (*Dancing* 66). In the same way that seeds from a tree will sit dormant for years until they sense the ideal conditions for germination and growth, seeds of knowledge planted by grandmothers and grandfathers have waited until now to sprout.

Though this teaching comes from a Nishnaabeg context rather than a Rotinonhsonni one, it resonates with me for its representation of the connection between ancestors and future generations. I understand the land to play an important role in this knowledge transmission. In cases such as mine, where colonialism creates a rift between generations, I can still access seeds of knowledge and follow the original instructions of Shonkwaia'tishon by reading the land. Attempting to do so with *yotsìtsyonte o:se* led me to an understanding of myself as being part of the creation history. In other words, while my grandparents never knew me and so could not plant the seeds of resurgence within me, I have many ancestors who returned to the land when they died, and so the land is where I can reclaim those seeds of knowledge. Developing a relationship with *o:se* and reading her through our oral histories helped me to come to this realization. This connection between the land, ancestors, and my own identity as *onkwehonwe*

was confirmed and clarified for me when I asked my teacher and friend, Tehota'kerá:tonh, to help me explain this in the language. I asked him for a word that meant looking back, returning to ourselves, gathering knowledge, thoughtways, and culture that were lost or misplaced due to colonialism and the rebirthing of that in our younger generations. In response, he offered the word *entsitewatahkhwennyon:ko*, which means "we will go back on their tracks" or "we will do something in the way that our grandparents used to." "We use this word when doing any ceremonies or feasts," he explained, "because it represents a dynamic, living culture that is tied to everything that has gone on before." He further explained that we don't have words for decolonization because the concept doesn't translate. "It's more like you either follow our culture or you don't. The doing comes from action. Not doing comes from inaction or not participating because our culture is dependent on interaction."[30] So inserting myself into the creation history, understanding my body as a re-enactment of the story and my daughter and I as connected both to past ancestors and future generations, allowed me to do kinship, to do *onkwehonweneha*. It was a rebirthing of self within the broader context of Creation. This teaching couldn't have come to me at a better time, as two weeks to the day before Wren was born, my father died quite suddenly. He died of septicemia in his sixty second year. His death ripped a hole in my world, the jagged edges of which I am still discovering. But like Atsi'tsiaka:yon, my daughter's birth was a medicine that lifted the heaviness and pain from my heart and let joy and wonder back in.

I returned to visit *yotsìtsyonte o:se* in late June. I brought Wren, who was four months old, healthy and hearty, with me to the forest and we lay together on a blanket and watched the dance of the leaves. I introduced Wren and told *o:se* of our loss. Watching my daughter taking in

[30] Tehota'kerá:tonh December 26, 2016

the forest for the first time, it came to me that with each baby born the world is reborn, too. Not only because they are Indigenous babies and our very survival resists colonialism, but also because how they see the world will influence how they interact, shape and treat the world. If I give Wren access to Kanien'keha and the knowledge, songs, dances, and ceremonies of our people, it will change the world. Like the seeds that Atsi'tsiaka:yon brought with her from the sky world, the seeds of the Seventh Fire Prophecy that Simpson describes need fertile ground in which to grow. We need the fertile, living earth that muskrat brings from beneath the sea to plant those seeds of Indigenous resurgence. In other words, we need the minds of our children to be open and receptive to this knowledge. We need our children to understand and enact *entsitewatahkhwennyon:ko*, to recover themselves in relation with and to the earth rather than to external, colonial labels and laws. I suggest that as an enactment of *entsitewatahkhwennyon:ko*, being your own creation history will allow those seeds to grow.

Reading the leaves and bark of *yotsìtsyonte o:se* reaffirms these place-thoughts. Her tiered canopy exemplifies a typical family tree structure, and her pinnate and bowed venation resembles labia – associating her with birth. Her bark, often described as looking like alligator skin, is made up of many square plates with shallow grooves running between them. Taking my cue from the creation history, I asked my mother[31] for help in reading *o:se's* bark aesthetically and metaphorically. She suggested that the plates remind her of people working together to protect the tree, separate and yet the same. The tree needs them all to be healthy. If the bark begins to peel or flake off it indicates a diseased tree or one under environmental stress. Together, *o:se's* canopy, leaves, and bark echo place-thought and oral history readings about

[31] While *entsitewatahkhwennyon:ko* is indeed kinship based, it occurs in the families we have, regardless of bloodlines or biology. Thus, I refer to my mother without any qualifiers, such as adoptive, as she is the only one who mothers me, she is mother to me. In a sense then, I have multiple sets of ancestors (biological and adoptive) from whom I inherit knowledge, and can connect to through the earth.

birth and kinship. The significance of such interpretations deepens when considering *yotsìtsyonte o:se* from the perspective of dendrology.

Cornus Florida is an endangered tree under threat by climate change, deforestation, and dogwood anthracnose, an introduced, invasive disease. “Invasive” refers to a species that has moved outside of its native habitat and threatens the new environment, economy or society by disrupting local ecosystems. Anthracnose causes dieback, which impedes the tree’s reproduction. The youngest saplings are also the first to die and in great numbers every time the disease travels. There are obvious parallels here to contact and colonization. Indigenous women have been forcibly sterilized in order to prevent the reproduction of future generations of Indigenous Peoples. Many epidemics, such as smallpox for example, were introduced by settlers. These diseases decimated the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island. Anthracnose’s targeting of young saplings also mirrors the theft and murder of Indigenous children in residential schools and child welfare. The result has been a fracture of our ancestry. Seeds of knowledge were meant to be passed down from mother to daughter so that we could enact *entsitewatahkhwennyon:ko* and be part of a dynamic living culture that is connected to everything that has gone on before and to the coming faces as well, but this intergenerational relationship was intentionally disrupted. The result is that there are entire generations of our people who have fallen between the cracks.

My birth mother hid her pregnancy from her parents because they were Christian, and she was not married, and had not meant to get pregnant. She put me up for adoption because she did not want her family or community to know she was pregnant, and she did not feel she had the resources or ability to parent me. This was a tremendous sacrifice on her part, and one that makes me both grateful and sad. For years, I felt like the cultivated dogwood, living alone in the city and longing for the forest. I had resources and opportunities that forested dogwoods did not,

but I was cut off from the memories, kinship, and roots of the forest. I had no one to tell me or show me how to be dogwood. I felt like a failed tree. I sometimes still do. While I realized the importance of going back on my ancestor's tracks, I had no way of finding those tracks. I did not know what I needed to know about being me, and internalized this ignorance into narratives of personal failure and shame. This is an example of intergenerational trauma. The irony here, is that the shame of not knowing my heritage made me feel I did not have a right to that heritage. This is the kind of internalized colonialism that disrupts the growth of the seeds of Indigenous knowledge resurgence. I now realize that part of what *entsitewatahkhwennyon:ko* requires is a shift away from an understanding of tree-ness or Indigeneity through binaries of planted or non-planted, assimilation or nativism.

The following literary analysis section of this chapter reads Chickasaw author Linda Hogan's novel, *Power*, through the teachings of *yotsìtsyonte o:se*, and through the cosmologies of the Rotinonhsonni and Seminole nations. Read across from one another, these texts teach me that being *onkwehonwe* isn't about where I live, or the tint of my skin, or even how well (or poorly) I do the women's shuffle dance, but about my thinking, my heart, and my mind. By putting myself into our sacred stories, by understanding myself through the land and as part of the land, I find myself reconnecting to ancestors and to *Kayanerekowa* – and that is powerful.

* * * *

PART 2 ~ Be Your Own Creation Story

"*Our Elders tell us that everything we need to know is encoded in the structure, content and context of these stories and the relationships, ethics and responsibilities required to be our own Creation Story" (Simpson, Dancing 33).*

Yotsìtsyonte o:se taught me that I am the creation history, that I am part of Creation, and an actor in its recreation, rather than a passive or helpless observer. She taught me that though the knowledge that comes from our stories can be interpreted metaphorically, it is real. And she gave me the insight to understand the importance of teaching these stories to my daughter, who will grow up knowing her relationships to ancestors and the land, and will be able to use that to power her good mind. By helping me to understand myself within the context of Rotinonhsonni cosmologies – both by inserting myself into the creation history as Atsi'tsiaka:yon, and by accepting my status as a great-great-granddaughter of First Woman – *yotsìtsyonte o:se* actualized *entsitewatahkhwennyon:ko* within me. I realized that even in the face of intergenerational trauma and external threats to our ability to be self-determined *onkwehonwe*, we (Rotinonhsonni) still do many of the things that our grandparents did that defined them as *onkwehonwe*. We do our ceremonies in alignment with the seasons, we give thanks to Creation through song, dance, prayer, and medicines, and we tell stories that define us as a people. Our persistence as a people, and our cultural continuity speaks to the aliveness of our teachings and philosophies. Affirming *entsitewatahkhwennyon:ko* by embodying and passing on teachings is profoundly anti-colonial (although neither its articulation nor practice depends upon comparison to colonialism). Taking my cue from Leanne Simpson, I therefore title this section, and the land-centered philosophy it explores, "be your own creation story." The trans-Indigenous methodology of this chapter

juxtaposes Rotinonhsonni, Chickasaw, and Seminole knowledges.[32] I argue that inserting ourselves into the creation history and embodying its teachings gives us the power to uproot the rank ideologies of colonialism and enact *entsitewatahkhwennyon:ko* so that who we are and what we do is self-defined.[33] This re-centers us in the flow of ancestors before us and the coming faces after us. In effect, this is a connection to land as both our ancestors and the coming faces are in the earth. Within the context of Hogan's novel, this teaching appears through Ama – a traditionalist, auntie figure – who inserts both herself and Omishto – who is like a daughter to her – into Taiga creation and re-creation stories. In so doing Ama reconnects Omishto to her shared kinship with the land, her relative Sisa (the panther), and to her Panther Clan. This restores Omi's central relationship with Oni (in the Taiga vernacular), or the Giver of Breath (*Hisagita Misa*/*Isákit' imisi*, in Seminole), so that she can walk in the tracks of her ancestors (literally – she walks in the tracks of the Panther) and recreate the world.

From within the cycle of *Kayanerekowa*, power or *ka'shatstenhsera*, refers to one's capacity to effect change. As mentioned above, *ka'shatstenhsera* can also be understood as the breath gifted to *onkwehonwe* by Shonkwaia'tishon in our creation; it is the energy that enlivens all things. In her portrayal of Taiga teachings about Oni – the wind, or *tsi teyowerawenrie* in Kanien'keha – Hogan's novel conveys a similar concept of power. In the Taiga worldview, "The wind is a living force" that "enters us all at birth and stays with us all through life. It connects us to every other creature" (Hogan 28). Reminiscent of Rotinonhsonni ontologies of

[32] The fictional nation in *Power*, the Taiga, appears to be based on the Seminole nation of Florida. There are several factors that contribute to this likelihood: first, the story is set in the Florida Everglades, the home of the Seminole nation; second, Ama's sacrifice of the Panther and subsequent trial for killing an endangered species mirrors the 1987 trial of James E. Billie, a former chief of the Seminole nation; and third, the details of the Taiga cosmology bear remarkable similarity to that of the Seminoles.

[33] While here I refer to the teachings about the cycle of life, death, and rebirth that came to me through parallel readings of *yotsitsyonte o:se* and the Rotinonhsonni creation history, it is also worth mentioning that in general cosmological teachings depend on the individual, are multiple, and change over time and circumstance.

Kayanerenhserako:wa, Hogan describes Oni as the wind and air that makes up "the sea of creation we live inside" (178). Like the breath of Shonkwaia'tishon, Oni "is the breath of life translated from trees," a life-force "every bit as strong as gravity" (178). Though invisible, Oni carries air, words and voices that tell a story and "its hands are laid down on every living thing" (178). As all things in a Rotinonhsonni worldview are *ka'shatstenhsera*-bearing, in the Taiga cosmology Oni animates and connects all life. Seminole cosmologies also grant central importance to a Breathgiver, *Isákit' imisi*.

In *The Tree that Bends*, Patricia Wiles Wickman transcribes a conversation with Dale Jumper Grasshopper, a local Miccosukee Seminole woman who offers insight into the importance of *Isákit' imisi* within her peoples' worldview:

> My great uncle, my mother's mother's brother (I would call him my Clan grandfather), was the one who, by tradition, taught me. He was the one who showed me how the circles fit together and how my personal "balance" influences everyone in the community—not just myself or the people in my house. Actually, it's a series of [concentric] circles, like a target. I am in the center, but I am not alone. The Breath Giver is there also and our relationship is the center. Then, the next circle is my personal relationship with a husband or wife. The next circle beyond that is my relationship with my children, and the outer circle is my relationship with my Clan and the rest of the community. I have to keep each one of those circles in proportion; if one gets too big or too little, all the others suffer. A change in one of them produces a change in all of them. (49)

Wickman attributes the cultural continuity and coherence of the Maskokálgî throughout both Spanish and English invasions and ongoing settlement to the circularity, inclusiveness, and flexibility of this Seminole worldview. Wickman, a settler scholar who lives on the Big Cypress

Indian Reservation in Florida, offers her understanding of Maskókî cosmologies based on conversations with local descendants of those people (Creek, Seminole, Miccosukee). She explains that the Maskokálgî (the People of the Maskókî Way) follow the teachings of the *hiya yálgî* (Four Teachers, People of the Light or Illuminators) who came from the four cardinal directions to bring enlightenment to the people about "how they should relate to *Isákit' imisi* (from *isákita*, breath; life), the Giver of Breath" (40). As everything in Creation is made from the same sacred breath, the teachings of the *hiya yálgî* promote a "reciprocal relationship of the Maskokálgî with all of the other elements and forces of the universe" (46). One of these forces, medicine, is understood by the Maskokálgî to function at all levels of society. This medicine – what Wickman refers to as a "medicine domain" – was and continues to be a very important part of Seminole society because it serves as "the medium of communication and interaction between seen and unseen forces in the cosmos. That is, it constantly recalibrates the society that … must have all of its parts operating in balance with reference to each other in order to function successfully" (46). This reflects Grasshopper's description of needing to keep each concentric circle of her various relationships in balance, an equilibrium that "depends upon a circular, or inclusionary view of all life" in which each being "has its own right to exist" and all things "exist in complementarity to each other, rather than in opposition." In contrast to the Catholicism the Spanish attempted to force upon the Maskokálgî, this worldview understands "[*Isákit' imisi*] and humans, men and women, and humans and nature" to all function "in a symbiosis within which there is no need to 'pit man against nature,' to 'wage the age-old battle of the sexes,' or to face one's maker at such a relational disadvantage that one images one's self as 'a mere flyspeck in the universe'" (47). Therefore, the *hiya yálgî* (Illuminators, Four Teachers) teach that the relationship between each person and *Isákit' imisi* is intimate and deeply personal. This context

is important for understanding someone like Omi whose relationships with *Isákit' imisi*, her family, and clan are all disrupted and out of balance. This loss of equilibrium that Omi experiences in each of her relational circles is intergenerational, and is the inherited legacy of Spanish invasion, attempted conversion, and mythmaking about Seminoles' foreign origins and migration to Florida.

Anthracnose

Power begins with Omishto lying on the bottom of a boat, floating in the swamp where clouds are born from water. Floating there, Omishto is deterritorialized: "Even the boat is like a cloud moving across water" (2). Avoiding the dangers at home – her stepfather's wandering eyes and her mother's resultant bad moods – Omishto seeks refuge in the obscurity of water and fog. Waking in her boat in the swamp among the clouds, it is "as if [she is] just beginning to live" (1). We soon learn that Omi often seeks refuge from a threatening home environment by sleeping afloat in the boat that was her biological father's. Combined with her later admission of ignorance about her birth story, and the estrangement she feels towards her family, I suggest that waking in the boat and feeling as if she is "just beginning to live" may be a habitual occurrence for Omi. Unmoored from both past and future, the concentric circles of belonging that should root Omi in a network of kin are instead obfuscated. Renee Thomas Hill, a Kanien'keha:ka elder from Grand River, once shared with me that knowing our birth stories can be very important and empowering. As I understand it, our birth stories tell us where we come from, and how we entered the world, so they can teach us about who we are and where we belong. They connect us to our mothers, and their mothers before them. When we know our birth story, we know our ancestors. Situating ourselves in this way helps us feel connected. Without knowledge of her beginnings, Omishto feels uprooted. Though she belongs to the Taiga Nation and the Panther

Clan, colonialism and settler capitalist priorities have endangered both the Taiga, of which there are only thirty, and the Florida Panther, of which (in 1998 when Hogan wrote *Power*) only between thirty to fifty remain (Florida Panther 4-117). The grief and trauma of fragmentation caused by the murderer, De Soto, and the legacy of greed, theft and genocide that survived him enters Omishto like blood memory. Instead of intergenerational knowledge, stories, language and ceremonies, Omishto's cultural inheritance is anguish. She imagines how settlers would feel if they were forced into "a place outside their world," filled with "a darkness they could never light" and subjected to generations of destruction until there were only thirty of them left. She believes they "could not dare to survive it. They would … fall down in despair and hit themselves. They'd wish for life and death, both at the same time" (Hogan, *Power* 119). The strength that Omishto might rely upon in the face of such anguish – her family, clan, ancestors, and *Isákit' imisi* (Breathmaker) – have also been distanced from her.

Comparing herself to the old people who live at Kili Swamp and follow the old ways, Omishto reflects that though "it seems there is a world of difference" between them, "truly there is not. A generation of difference only, the generation my mother fell into like into a crack of the earth. I wonder who and what I would be now, in this day, if not for the crack in that world, the generation of my mother's that lies between us" (225). Overwhelmed by feelings of cultural lostness, Omi laments that the old people at Kili "remember what they were born knowing. Nothing replaced or erased it like it has done with me. Me, I am a dissolved person, like salt in water" (231). Her mother (hereafter referred to as Mama), who Omishto identifies as belonging to a lost generation, has no memory of her daughter's birth "because in those days they put women to sleep to give birth and sometimes they remained asleep for years" (222). This statement is significant on several levels. First, without knowledge of her birth story, Omishto

perpetually feels as if she is "not yet born, not really" (109). Secondly, this description of Mama as being asleep reflects her struggle throughout the novel as someone who "doesn't love herself … because she believes like they tell her in church, that it was our fate to be destroyed by those who were stronger and righter. She believes evil and ignorance are the natural state of humans, swamps, and animals, and we must save ourselves from it" (187). Having internalized colonial judgements of her Indigeneity as primitive and sinful, Mama tries to pass for white and has a "split mind," leading her to see love as "something we have in small measures" (20). For Mama, there is "never enough of it [love] to go around" and so she "sees everything as a threat that will subtract love from her world" (20). This internalized colonialism and lack of love – a clear indication to me that Mama's relationships with *Isákit' imisi*, her family, clan, and nation are out of balance – disrupt Mama's ability to parent Omishto or teach her about her place in Creation. Again, this internalization leaves Omishto disconnected from her family, her ancestors and her culture. Finally, I read this reference to putting women to sleep during childbirth as suggestive of decades of state intervention in Indigenous women's reproductive rights. While it was at one time a common practice to put all women to sleep for childbirth, Indigenous women have endured additional levels of reproductive oppression. Indigenous women have been forcibly sterilized, their children have been stolen, their lands and so their bodies have been poisoned, causing miscarriages and stillborn deaths. Like *yotsìtsyonte o:se,* whose babies are threatened by invasive dogwood anthracnose, and the yellow dogtooth violet that prevents pregnancy and can lead to sterilization, I read these threats to Indigenous women's life-giving powers as signifying a need for rebirth, recreation, and resurgence. Reclaiming *entsitewatahkhwennyon:ko,* and the stories that help us enact it, are part of this process.

Cultivar vs. Nonplanted (*Aterihwahnira:tshera ne Kaswéntah*)

Intergenerational trauma, unresolved historic grief, and internalized colonialism disconnect Omishto from her family, clan and nation. This disconnection from who she is and her place in Creation causes consternation in Omishto. Torn between the external world's perception of her and her own limited understanding of what it means to be Taiga, Omishto is of a split mind; or, to put it in a Rotinonhsonni context, she has one foot in the settler ship and the other in the *onkwehonwe* canoe. Despite this disconnection, the land and its place-thought call to Omishto: "sometimes I long for, I feel a longing for the old ways [Ama] lives by. And that's why I come here. I feel called" (19). While this calling might lead her to learn the old ways, to seek out those left in the Taiga community who could teach her *entsitewatahkhwennyon:ko*, a competing voice within her keeps her from doing so. This voice turns what Ama understands to be real – cosmologies, spiritual culture, the agency of nonhuman societies, the power of song and traditional knowledge – into myth, superstition, and primitive ignorance; it pits knowledge against belief where Western science and book learning trump Indigenous belief and orality. As Omishto puts it, she doesn't "believe in magic" because "at school I learn there is a reason for everything" (13). Western epistemologies separate Omi from Ama because "as smart as she is she never went to high school" and "even though she reads, she still swears by old-time beliefs, and she believes in all the Taiga stories, that they are true, that they are real" (13). Omishto doesn't believe in the things that Ama does because "it's a different world what with the houses and highways" (13). In the same way that Christianity splits Mama's mind, Omishto's is split by a Western education that invalidates Indigenous knowledge, peoples, and lifeways. Even her love for Ama is corrupted by this invalidation:

> My feelings about Ama are mixed, I admit. Sometimes I love her, and in those moments I think the gap between her teeth is beautiful. But there are times I don't even like her, and

> on those days I think she's ugly. I can't account for these feelings, but I think it has to do with how the world catches me up. It's when I've come from school I'm most likely to find her homely and strange. I see her through the eyes of other people and what they'd think of her. Through their eyes she looks wild and crazy. (19)

In a classic example of Franz Fanon's third person consciousness, Omishto sees Ama – and I think we are meant to infer, herself – through a racist lens. Fanon describes an analogous experience where upon entering the "white world," his blackness begins to signify to himself as inferior; his "inferiority comes into being through the other" and "consciousness of the body" becomes "solely a negating activity" (Fanon 258). For Omi, this divided consciousness causes an internal struggle between intuition and impulses to become born, to nurture her landed self and Taiga roots, and external devaluations of land, story and kinship. The same struggle rages in Mama, who, Omishto can see, both respects and is jealous of Ama. Though she's "made her choices," Mama would "like it both ways … She'd like to learn from the old people, live the way we used to, but she wants it modern, too" (Hogan, *Power* 16). Once again, we encounter a dichotomy between the cultivated dogwood and non-planted *yotsìtsyonte o:se*, between assimilation and nativism. Ama, however, sees through this false binary. She insists that "it's not about choices but about heart and heart is what Mama's low on" (16). The reason Mama cannot find peace within herself, then, is not because she wants both a traditional and modern life, but because there is something absent in her emotional self, because she is "parched for love" (20). If all of Creation is made up of loving energy, then Mama's detachment from love equates to a detachment from Creation, from life itself. From a Seminole perspective, this detachment suggests that Mama's relationship with Breathmaker is disrupted, and as this is the central relationship meant to ensure balance in all her other relationships, it makes sense that she

struggles as a spouse, a mother, a Panther Clan woman, and member of the Taiga nation. Ama, on the other hand, "reads the land and sky," nature "is part of her story" (9) and she "live[s] with the world and not against it" (47). This internal equilibrium grants Ama the ability to see that "the old ways are not enough to get us through this time" (22). In tune with Creation, Ama feels "called to something else," to "living halfway between the modern world and the ancient one" (22-3). Turning away from ideologies of fragmentation that reek of the kinds of identity politics invented and imposed by colonial structures such as the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, Ama sees a need for mobility, for fluidity. Like her Taiga ancestors who relied upon the flexibility of their cosmologies and clan systems to sustain them as a coherent culture during tremendous social upheaval, Ama relies upon Taiga cosmologies to enfold and sustain her as Taiga while also allowing her to adapt to the pressures of Euroamerican culture, and even pragmatically adopt elements of that culture into her Taiga-centered world. In other words, as long as Ama holds *Isákit' imisi*, Sisa, and the Panther Clan in her center, she can, for example, drive a car, buy food from a grocery store, speak English, hunt with a gun, and get married in a church. These cultural borrowings do not threaten her Taiga identity because her people's circular cosmologies are inclusionary on a metaphysical level, and so do not require things that are "new" to be categorically rationalized or rejected. Ama seems aware that Omishto has been taught to see in black and white and to think linearly, and that this creates an unhealthy instability in her. Recognizing that this mentality makes it impossible for Omi to reconcile the differing parts of her reality, Ama inserts them both into an enactment of the Taiga creation history. By reconnecting Omishto to her ancestors, to the land, to Sisa, and to the love of Creation, Ama tries to show her that living in between can be a strength and a calling, rather than a lostness, or a deficiency.

The Tree that Bends

Patricia Wickman's work seeks to dispel the myth that the Seminoles, Miccosukees, and Creeks did not originate from the territories that are now know as Florida, but migrated into a vacuum created by the conquest and extinction of the original Indigenous inhabitants, the Maskókî. In fact, Wickman reveals, it was the British who, when they took over the Florida peninsula from the Spanish, fabricated both the names and histories of these present-day tribes to suit their own needs for uncontested land acquisition. Wickman's research into both Euroamerican accounts and present-day Seminole memories demonstrates that the Maskókî never left their traditional territories. Though the Spanish and British documented vacated villages and lowering populations as evidence that the Maskókî were conquered or disappearing, they were actually, according to Wickman, migrating and relocating to other affiliated clans in response to settler infringement. This Euroamerican rewriting of history culminated in 1763 when the Spanish relinquished Florida to the English, and the English used the so-called absence of Indigenous Floridians to justify the theft of land and resources, and to deny Maskókî sovereignty. Deeming that the Maskókî had either left with the Spanish or been killed, the English rebranded all remaining Natives in the area as Seminoles, Creeks, or Miccosukees. While the name "Creek" was a bioregional misnomer (those who lived in villages near creeks were named as such) (36), the term Seminoles comes from the word *cimarrones*.

Cimarrones were those Natives who "throughout the entire two and one-half centuries of Spanish negotiations" retained the option "to quit the negotiations and place themselves physically beyond the Spaniards' sphere of discourse and power" (192). Wickman explains that these *cimarrones*

> would re-ally themselves in affinity groups throughout La Florida's peninsula and beyond Spanish control and, although the English would anglicize the epithet that the Spaniards had applied to them, these generic 'Siminolies' would still be Abalachi and Abalachicolo and Chatot and Potano and Guale and Hitchiti, and Yamásî and Yuchî, and many more. (192)

In other words, faced with Spanish demands for cultural suicide, Indigenous peoples from various Maskókî tribes would uproot to join with another clan who offered them asylum beyond the grasp of the Spanish. Therefore, while from a tribal perspective the cultural distinctiveness of these nations persists, from a Spanish and English perspective, entire nations "were wiped out," and the pan-Indian Seminoles were consolidated in settler minds. Thus, while in settler discourse *cimarrones* takes on the meaning of "fearful people escaping from their proper place," for the present-day Seminole the phrase denotes "an indomitable people who choose not to permit themselves to be controlled or domesticated by any others" and "who have steadfastly maintained freedom of thought and action and refused to accept a restricted life or to submit themselves involuntarily to the dominion of another" (194). Thus, while the Seminole cosmology enables change and adaptation, especially in a social capacity, it also staunchly supports autonomy and self-determination. Faced with such external impositions on their person- and nation-hood, the Maskóki "remade themselves," using the adaptability of their cosmologies to embrace new identities as Seminole, Creek, and Miccosukee nations who were still Maskokálgî (the People of the Maskóki Way) (Wickman 3). As Wickman puts it, "the Maskokálgî cosmogony was sufficiently plastic to absorb external cultural pressures without disarticulating under their demands" (42). Depending on their extended, intertribal clan system to absorb refugees and *cimarrones*, the Maskóki "retained the central autonomy of their own self-imaging"

by relying on the flexibility of their cosmogonies which "were strong enough to permit the people to incorporate useable cultural borrowings and to manipulate those extracultural elements into shapes that they could anchor firmly within their own matrix" (Wickman 206). Citing the continuing existence of a distinct and coherent Makokálgî culture today as reaffirmation of this process, Wickman reminds us of the old axiom, "The tree that bends does not break" (42). This imagery also describes Ama's anti-essentialist approach to being Taiga in a modern world. She sees Omi suffer in her attempts to be either traditionally Taiga, or to abandon her Indigeneity altogether and pretend, like her mother, to be white. This binary – suggestive of the tree that breaks – locks Omishto in cycles of skepticism, self-doubt, displacement, and alienation.

Oni & *Ooki* Uproot Methuselah

From a Rotinonhsonni, and I daresay a Taiga, perspective, wind (Oni) and water (*Ooki*, in Mikisúki) are *ka'shatstenhsera*-bearing, intelligent, aware of their own existence, and capable of influencing their environment. Thus, the hurricane that roars through the opening of Hogan's novel can be read as Oni and *Ooki*'s refusal of settler capitalist priorities that cut, parch, poison, and flood the land. They create a hurricane to wash away the source of our Mother's pain, and to challenge those whose actions are so selfish and out of balance with the rest of Creation. Their arrival begins a process of rebirth in Omi, who is also marked by these actions.

As evidence for her argument that the fundamentally inclusive and flexible nature of the Maskókî culture ensured its survival, Patricia Wickman recounts the story of how in 1736, Christianized Seminoles, wanting to strategically shift their allegiance from the Spanish to the British, "simply struck themselves on the forehead saying, 'Go away water! I am no Christian!'" (Wickman 204). Reading this easy erasure as "an empowered response to the forced *imposition* of any outside definition—here, the coercive transformative ritual of Christian baptism—and the

accompanying assertion of self-definition" (149), Daniel Heath Justice argues for an interpretation of this ritual not as rejection, which he sees as "ultimately impotent and self-defeating," but as a "shifting away from the terms of 'cultural suicide'" (149). Opening these spaces for self-determination and survivance[34] means "we have to uproot those rank ideologies of fragmentation" that seek to define Indigeneity and things Indigenous against our will, and which "lay claim to our words but offer little but angst and alienation in exchange" (150). An important part of this process of uprooting, explains Justice, is challenging "the idea that the hyperindividualist creeds of industrialization and atomization are the wellsprings of intellectual sophistication" (150). In fact, Justice contends, the need to challenge such settler capitalist priorities and the violence they so often visit upon the land and its First Peoples has strengthened Indigenous cultures, beliefs, and nations. As Justice puts it, "Indigenous intellectual traditions have survived not because they've conceded to fragmenting Eurowestern priorities, but because they've challenged those priorities" (149-50). Evoking now defunct pseudo-scientific taxonomies that categorize Indigenous Peoples' knowledges and intelligence as primitive and irrational has long been a cornerstone of settler colonial strategies for forced assimilation and government dependency, land theft, and genocide. Omishto articulates her experience of this set of practices at school, where settler capitalist education invalidates Taiga knowledge, belief, and stories. This invalidation is not only a denial of her culture, but of herself. Thus, Omishto finds herself defined against her will by external forces that demand her cultural suicide. The cost of this internal battle is high; Omi feels that "there is no one, nothing on this God's great planet to make a place in the world for [her]" (Hogan, *Power* 104). Because her Taiga self – the one who sees the lives of animals, plants, waters and minerals as equal in value to humans - is othered so

[34] Gerald Vizenor's neologism, combining survival and resistance.

systemically (by her family, settler education, health and legal systems) the only future she can see for herself is black and white: "One fate exists in the white people's world, the other exists in the older world of my own people. Our lives, any of us, could break and fall outward in any direction, but for people like me there are only two ways to fall" (215). Like the invasive kudzu vines that choke the life out of the indigenous plants in the swamp, and the great tree Methuselah planted by the Spanish that takes away sunlight and resources from the native swamp saplings, Omi is restrained from finding herself, her place in Creation and from *entsitewatahkhwennyon:ko* by deeply entrenched colonialism. But she is not alone in her struggle; her ancestors Oni, Sisa and *Ooki* come to her aid.

In Kanien'keha, the verb *kennorenh*, to be raining, has as its root word the verb *-noronh* (being precious). One of my language teachers, Tehahenteh, therefore translates the literal meaning of the word for rain as, "obviously it is precious." This root is also used to ask how much something costs: *to ni' kannorenh* literally means, how precious is it? In other words, from a Rotinonhsonni perspective, water is gold. Water is alive and sacred. Water connects us all to the earth; the water that runs through our bodies is the same that travels from stream, to ocean, to sky. It plays a pivotal role in countless human creation histories. According to Rotinonhsonni and Taiga (Seminole) creation histories, both water and wind played key roles in our creation. Wind, or breath, is the gift Creator gave to bring us to life, and it continues to give us life in the air we breathe (trees play an important role in this too, as they continue to renew that original gift of breath Creator gave us). When Atsi'tsiaka:yon came into this world, it was entirely made up of water, and it is from these waters that life begins with a gift of mud. These generative waters, protecting and nourishing new life, parallel the sacred waters women carry inside of themselves when they are pregnant, and so the waters connect their bodies to the earth and to the creation

history in a real way. Omi, too, connects wind and water to Creation. She remembers what Ama has told her, that this "was how the world was created … out of wind and lashing rain. 'We were blown together by a storm in the first place.' It was all created out of storms. The mud was blown in with the trees and the seeds of growing things already planted in it" (42-3). To Ama and Omi the value of rain and water is obviously very precious, but this perspective is not shared by a settler state that assumes it can enforce its mastery over water without any significant consequence.

Though the Taiga nation (*taiga*, meaning forest) is fictional, the territories that Hogan describes as their homeland appear to be located near the real swamps of the southeastern U.S. Climate change and man-made impositions upon water's natural paths have a direct and negative impact on this homeland, called Pahayokee, meaning "great grass water" in the Mikisúkî language[35] (also known as the Everglades). Though it is a tropical wetland, Omi tells us that the land and trees of Pahayokee need rain, that it "has been a drought," a year "of wildfire in places that were swamp" and the year "Lake Okeechobee was opened and the water level down here rose so much it drowned all the fawns" (27). Because the natural flow of floodwaters to the south infringes on the priorities of the state – urban development, tourism, and sugar cane – water is taken for granted, abused, and manipulated, polluting the coastline, endangering fish habitats, and drowning and starving Pahayokee animals like deer and wading birds. To some this is "the small price you pay for progress," but to Ama and Omishto, "it's the way to kill a world" (27). It is in the face of these conditions that Oni and *Ooki* come together to create a hurricane that will,

[35] The Seminole Tribe of Florida website makes the following statement about their languages: "Today, the members of the Seminole tribe speak one or both of two languages: Maskókî and Mikisúkî. These are the only two left from among the dozens of dialects that were spoken by their ancestors here in the Southeast. Maskókî, erroneously called 'Creek' by English speakers, is the core language. Mikisúkî is a dialect of Hitchiti, which was itself a dialect of the core language, Maskókî. Although Maskokî is spoken in Oklahoma as well as in Florida, Mikisukî is spoken in only one place on earth: in South Florida, by the members of the Seminole and Miccosukee Tribes."

like the Seminoles that Wickman describes, wipe away colonial hegemony both ideologically (in Omi) and geographically (they uproot Methuselah, destroy roads, houses, electrical wires, and sugar farms).

The winds that fly deer and fish through the air and make Omi afraid she will blow off the face of the earth have come to challenge those who rape the earth and exploit the generosity of our Mother. Oni and *Ooki* both have come to remind the people of their utter dependence upon the gifts of the Creation around them. And they have come to help Omi find Indigenous ways of knowing and being. To do so, however, they must demobilize the colonial mentalities that prevent Omi from coming to know herself. It is no coincidence then, that the tree Methuselah, brought from another continent and planted by the Spanish "with its tangled dark roots hanging on five hundred years" (6), grasps desperately during the storm with its "gnarled … old, old hands, hanging on to the earth" (30). Omi believes that Methuselah, a tree as old as Columbus' arrival to South America, will survive the storm, and so she claws her way along the ground towards it. It is shocking to her, then, when the hurricane whips up its strongest winds and rains to fell the old tree. After five centuries, Methusaleh is gone, leaving the young trees previously stunted by its shaded canopy to survive (52). As the tree uproots, Omi thinks that she "hear[s] from somewhere inside [her]self a sucking sound of roots tugged out of earth by invisible hands" (49). Oni, a force of Creation, pulls out the invasive rhizomes of colonialism from Omi's mind; Oni demobilizes the knowledge of the Spanish invaders within Omishto, making room for self-definition and survivance. The younger trees that could not thrive in the overpowering shadow of Methuselah now have room to grow. The seeds Omi's ancestors planted in her mother and in her centuries ago, that have been lying dormant, waiting for the optimal time to sprout, can finally grow. The death of colonial thinking within us, in other words,

allows the seeds planted by Indigenous ancestors to finally have a chance to grow. The storm and uprooting of the tree allow Omishto to become aware of place-thought. She remembers that she's dreamed that Ama and she will hunt the panther, and she becomes susceptible to the powers of the place, of Oni and ancestors who encourage her to insert herself into the story. All of these lessons come together to enable Omi to follow Ama into the swamps to hunt and kill the panther and begin a process of rebirth.

Sacred Waters & Rebirth

In "Bodies of Water: Exploring Birth Place and Ceremony in Manitoba, Canada," Rachel Olson, from the Tr'ondek Hwech'in First Nation in the Yukon Territory, shares some of the water teachings she's received from Indigenous midwives. She writes that "key to achieving a 'good life' is development of the relationship between one's body and the earth" (348) and that pregnancy and childbirth are good teachers of this connection. In other words, knowing that the substance of your body, the material (flesh moulded from mud) and immaterial (breath and energy), is connected to the substance of the rest of all Creation is key in any journey for good thinking and peaceful living. The storm reconnects Omishto's body to the land and releases her mind from the grip of colonial mentalities that displace belief in the validity, realness, and value of her own peoples' stories, thought- and life-ways. As the storm envelops her, she says, "I am inching my way to a birth through air, laboring, moving toward Ama" (Hogan, *Power* 34). The storm reminds her of her first environment, the womb of her Mother Earth. Oni and *Ooki* reconnect her not only to the origins of her own life, but to all life. The waters of the storm are like birth waters, they re-create her: "What else can I do when I'm so small and what's bigger than me now—and everything is—has water running everywhere like something is being born" (35). The waters of the storm are like the waters that break when a woman gives birth: they

"[wash] that doorway for the new spirit to come" (Olson 347). *Ooki* washes the doorway for Omi so that her new spirit can come through. When the storm is finally over, she is "naked as the day I entered this world and breathed my first breath" (Hogan, *Power* 41). Like rain that softens the ground and feeds seeds for new growth, the seeds planted in Omishto by her ancestors can grow after the storm washes away the internalized colonialism that interrupts her from seeing Indigenous knowledge as valid and valuable. Ama plays an important role in that process, she "is herself something like a storm, not a whirlwind…but a storm that brings thunder and lightning and rain, renewal. Ama is like that rain…like rain that is nourishing but has to fall. And when it does, the world rises up once again and grows" (186). Like Atsi'tsiaka:yon who has to fall to begin a new cycle of life, death and rebirth here in our world, Ama and the storm begin to grow the seeds in Omi that will help return equilibrium to the concentric circles of her belonging, that will allow her mind to decolonize and "return to the original way of thinking about the world" (Hogan, "Sea Level" 170).

Histories of Creation and Re-Creation

By inserting Omishto and herself into Taiga creation and re-creation histories, Ama reconnects Omi to *entsitewatahkhwennyon:ko*. Immersed in an acting out of the story of her ancestors, and the relationships that the story teaches, Omi begins to regain some of her lost internal equilibrium. To show how Omishto is reborn into knowledge of herself through land and ancestors by following Ama into sacred Taiga stories, some context about the various creation histories at play will be helpful.

Juxtaposing Taiga, Seminole and Rotinonhsonni cosmologies enables insight into foundational teachings about *onkwehonwe* relationships with ecology, and the values and principles derived from such relationships. Rather than a pan-Indian, romanticized love of land,

similarities that present themselves in this side-by-side positioning of nation-specific stories are an indication that the land is a united energy (First Woman) who shares her teachings among her children. When Atsi'tsiaka:yon's daughter, Tekawerahkwa, died and her body mingled with the clay and soil she became y*ethinisten:ha onhwéntsia*, our Mother the Earth (First Woman). Our stories are representations of what she has taught us, ways to remember those teachings, and to convey them to our children as we were instructed by Shonkwaia'tishon. An analysis of different tribal histories, then, can, like muskrat's last swim, help important themes rise to the surface of the water and our thinking.

Legends of the Seminoles (1994), by Betty Mae Jumper (the first and only female chief of the Seminole Nation of Florida) is a short collection of Seminole stories passed down within Jumper's family. In the introduction to the collection, former Seminole chief James Billie – whose 1987 trial for killing a Florida Panther inspired *Power* – recounts a short version of his nation's creation history:

> When the earth was ready, Creator put all the animals in a large shell. He set it along the backbone of the earth - the real high mountains. "When the timing is right," He told the animals, "the shell will open and you will all crawl out. Someone or something will crack the shell and you must all take your respective places on the face of the earth." The Creator then sealed up the shell and left, hoping the Panther would be first to come out. Time went along, and nothing happened. Alongside the shell stood a great tree. As time passed, the tree grew so large that its roots started encircling the shell. Eventually a root cracked the shell. The Panther was patient, which the Creator liked. But, at this particular time, Panther was too patient. The Wind started circling around the crack in the shell, round and round the inside, so vigorously that the crack was made larger. The Wind,

> however, remembered that the Creator wished for the Panther to be on earth first. "We will fulfill the Creator's wishes," said the Wind, reaching down to help the Panther take its place on earth. The Wind was everywhere. The Wind was the air we breathe. After Wind helped the Panther out first, the Panther thanked Wind for the honor. Next to crawl out was the Bird. The Bird had picked and picked around the hole, and, when the time was right, stepped outside the shell. Bird took flight immediately. After that, other animals emerged in different sequences. Bear, Deer, Snake, Frog, Otter. There were thousands of others, so many that no one besides the Creator could even begin to count them all. All went out to seek their proper places on earth. (Billie in Jumper 7-8)

Many of the elements of this story bear strong similarity to the Taiga cosmology. Omi tells us that it was "the great anhinga bird" that "broke through the watery sky world with its beak … like the shell of an egg." While the bird rested, "the panther entered through the broken shell, the hole of creation, all golden eyes and secret pride and lithe stillness, walking as if every cell of its muscular body was breathed awake and healthy." Like the Seminole cosmology, panther is favoured by Creator, she is a "God of Gods," gifted with strength, beauty, and strong medicine (84). Omi also describes the "Taiga Birthplace" as the "place where the stones look like backbone" (54), evoking the same imagery of the "backbone of the earth" from Billie's narrative. In a trans-Indigenous juxtaposition of Chickasaw and Seminole oral history, Hogan also tells a Taiga re-creation story about Panther Woman.

Jeannie Barbour, Creative Development Director of the Department of Chickasaw Nation Communications & Community Development, describes Panther Woman as a "great strategist in the time of De Soto" (n.p.). As part of the tradition of Chickasaw women warriors who were great battle communicators and strategists, Panther Woman "and her husband put together 'the

plan' to drive De Soto from Chicaza, the village he took over when he first came to Chickasaw country" (Barbour n.p.). In her own use of trans-Indigeneity, Hogan interweaves this oral history with the Seminole creation history to tell of a panther woman who "lived in the dark swamp of the early world," was "raised by wild animals," and was given the task to "keep the world in balance" (Hogan, *Power* 110). To achieve this balance, the woman "sang the sun up in the morning" to "keep the world alive" (110). She fulfilled an important role in Creation, as she helped the people remember their original instructions from Creator, "she was there to refresh our thoughts and renew our acts" (110). After the world aged and our present world came into being, after people "had broken the harmony and balance of this world" (110) a hurricane created an opening between worlds. Panther Woman "saw that opening, and followed the panther into that other world" (110). Like Atsi'tsiaka:yon, "she went through that opening and entered it. And no one enters willingly" (110). In a place that could be the world we now live in, Panther Woman saw "rivers on fire, animals dying of sickness, and foreign vines" (110); she saw a dying world. When Oni blows the doorway closed behind her, Sisa tells Panther Woman she must sacrifice her: "'You have to kill one of us,' the panther, who was dying, told her. 'It should be me. I'm not the oldest or the weakest, but I'm the one you know best'" (110). In the same way that the Taiga (and Rotinonhsonni) believe animals who are hunted in a good way will offer themselves willingly as sustenance and then return to the spirit world, Sisa tells Panther Woman that if she is sacrificed in the right way, "all the animals and the panther would come back again and they'd be whole" (110). This is why in the Taiga language, "the word for sacrifice means 'to send away'" (110). True to her word, the panther is reborn and returns with the woman to where (or when) she came from. Once through the door, the woman "transformed herself into one of the catlike creatures" and "went away with it [Sisa] to live in that place no one has ever entered,

the place where a person could be lost for years and never find a hint of direction. Because it's the opening between the worlds, opened by a storm. Under the sky" (110-11). If we understand that the storm has agency, then it intended to open a doorway between worlds. Like the Celestial Tree who communicates with the Keeper to open a door between worlds and push Atsi'tsiaka:yon through, Storm and Sisa bring Panther Woman between worlds to renew this world. The place between worlds, a place of being lost, reflects Ama's place between the modern and traditional worlds. Called to this place, Ama's (and later Omishto's) in-betweenness puts her in a position to help her people and the land by using the medicine of the Panther Clan to restore balance. By inserting Omi and herself into the re-creation history, Ama (re)places Omi within the tradition of strong, defiant women like Panther Woman, who have fought for the rights, safety, and flourishment of their people. These creation histories strongly influence how the Taiga see and understand the Panther.

Sisa (or panther), meaning "godlike, all-powerful," is an elder to the Taiga people, a grandmother. "The first person to enter this world" (15), Sisa taught humans the word Oni, "the word for life itself, for wind and breath" (73). To the Taiga, the panther is a relative, a clan leader, a protector, and a creator. Sisa is not a metaphor or mythological figure, she is real and a very significant figure to the Indigenous people of the American south. Omi recalls that the old people used to teach that "an animal was born when we were born, that it is our one ally in this life. It lent us power when we needed it" (16). Rather than a metaphor, this teaching emphasizes the realness of our relationships with animals, especially clan animals. Animals are sentient, critical, and engaged with their world, including humans. Such a teaching connects the Taiga bodily to animals and the land, it teaches kinship and interdependence. In other words, knowing from birth that your animal relative has high expectations of you, protects you, and loves you,

teaches you accountability and responsibility to that relative and the land that is its home. This is also directly tied to your own wellbeing, sense of safety, and morality. It is therefore our responsibility to treat animals with respect, gratitude and empathy not only because their well-being is directly tied to our own, but because it is right, it is good thinking (in my language, *ka'nikonhrí:yo*) directing good action (*ka'shatstenhsera*). This is an example of how the sacred stories teach socio-critical thought and proper conduct. While Omi has only heard these teachings second hand from Ama (and continues to question their veracity), Ama knows in her bones that Sisa is kin, and that the health and well-being of the cat reflects the health and well-being both of the land and the Taiga people. This interdependent web of relationship reflects Seminole clan structures and their role in maintaining and restoring "cosmogonic equilibrium" (Wickman 49).

According to James Billie and several of his kin, the red/white clan system of the present-day Seminole is often essentialized as signifying war/peace. In fact, the broader symbolism of this relationship between clans involves upholding covenants with all parts of Creation. For example, the Panther Clan today is a red clan "because Panthers are traditionally medicine keepers who fight for the safety and health of the people" (Wickman 48). Red clans are responsible for "maintaining the Old Ways of the Four Teachers" by preserving and conserving "the medicine – the rhetorical and semiotic discourses that were the essence of [Maskokálgî] survival and success" (48). Through ceremony and ritual, red clans such as the Panthers "renewed the social contract with the unseen forces of creation, the contract that had been brought to them by the Four Teachers" (48). Ama's embodiment of the creation and re-creation histories (and the resultant death of the panther) is therefore a fulfilment of her responsibility as a Panther Clan woman to renew the spiritual contract with the unseen forces of creation.

Each of the Taiga, Seminole and Rotinonhsonni creation histories feature emergence (from a shell or hole in the sky), and movement downwards, mirroring a birth journey. Take, for example, muskrat, Atsi'tsiaka:yon, and Panther, who all fulfill important roles in the creation of the world by diving, falling, or flying down towards earth. Each of these beings courageously searches for a way to use their particular gifts to help in the creation of the world. Because their actions are motivated by caring for others, each of these beings acts as a sacrifice for the betterment of Creation. Atsi'tsiaka:yon's entry into our world, in particular, offers helpful insight into Ama's "sending away" of the panther. In the many different versions of Rotinonhsonni cosmologies, there is some debate about how Atsi'tsiaka:yon enters through the hole in the sky dome and falls into our world. Some of the stories say that she was pushed, some that she fell because of her own folly, and others that she chose to go willingly. In the version where the Keeper of the Tree pushes Atsi'tsiaka:yon, the event is often glossed over without explanation for what seems a violent betrayal. Reading Ama's or the Panther Woman's sacrifice of the panther alongside the Rotinonhsonni history provides helpful insight for this event; the Panther Woman narrative explains that a sacrifice is a "sending away," with an implied return. When Ama kills the panther, Omi feels that it is both right and wrong. Ama tells her to "Look at history and say this is bloody or this is death. Look at time, then tell me, because it is true as the stories say that this is everything the world turns on" (Hogan, *Power* 72). Though she doesn't quite understand, Omi intuits that Ama is right, but she also knows that "everything has been betrayed. And that it's all different now. Everything in the world is different and betrayed. In just one day, one act, nothing will ever be the same again" (72). From a Seminole perspective, Ama fulfills her responsibilities as a Panther Clan woman to use medicine to restore equilibrium to Omi, her nation, and this world. I suggest that it is through this Seminole lens that we can understand the

sending away of the panther and of Ama as a wrong but necessary act.[36] Thus, I suggest that the Keeper pushes Atsi'tsiaka:yon through the hole in the sky dome not because he is jealous or angry or violent, but because the Celestial Tree has communicated to him that the sacrifice of his wife and unborn child is necessary to allow the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth to continue. That she must go through something so terrifying and painful is not right, but it is necessary; it is everything the world turns on. Performing a trans-Indigenous reading between these Seminole (Taiga) and Rotinonhsonni cosmological narratives deepens insight into the socio-critical thoughtways of each nation. Both nations attribute power to nature, nonhumans, and the unseen forces of an intelligent ecology capable of influencing and being influenced by human behaviour. This dialogic relationship with nature appears in Seminole and Rotinonhsonni clan systems which connect humans to animal relatives in a mutual society requiring its members to follow protocols of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility to maintain balance, harmony, and longevity.[37] Juxtaposing the deep reciprocity of Indigenous relationships with nature, present and perceptible in both Seminole and Rotinonhsonni cosmologies, illustrates a worldview that recognizes and honours "the inevitable sacrificial sharing that living respectfully or generously in an ecology involves. Each of us, in the end, gives our life, whether we want to or not, to our neighbours in the ecosystem" (Coleman).

In the Rotinonhsonni and Seminole cosmologies, animals are created first in this world, and they are therefore our elder brothers. Humans were the last creation to be made, and it was

[36] Rather than engage in anthropological, religious, or psychological discourses about "sacrifice" I read the "sending away" of the Panther through an Indigenous (Seminole) lens, in keeping with my trans-Indigenous (Indigenous-to-Indigenous) methodology.

[37] Both Rotinonhsonni and Seminole nations also use ceremonies and medicine societies to interact with the unseen forces of their ecologies. While a full analysis is beyond the scope of the present work, it is notable that both the Seminole and Rotinonhsonni nations practice ceremonies (*e.g.* Green Corn) that give thanks and honour nonhuman societies (*i.e.* plants, medicines, sustenance, animals, *etc*.) for the gifts they share with the people. The implication is that if the people neglect to show proper respect, gratitude, and love, nature will withhold her gifts, or be unable to renew and thrive each year.

the animals who acted as our teachers and showed us how to survive and live in a good way. When humans forsake this relationship – for example, by killing more animals than they need, or by trapping them in structures so they are always available for slaughter – they lose the ability to talk and understand their elder brothers. Thus it is that Sisa "remembers when humans were so beautiful and whole that her own people envied them and wanted to be like them" (190). She remembers how "the whole world rejoiced with their voices," and how the panther people "surrounded the humans and gave them life and power, medicine to heal, to hunt, even to direct lightning and stormclouds away from their beautiful dark-eyed children" (190). Humans were Sisa's "little brothers and sisters," they were kin and she "never preyed on them, nor does she now. Her work was to help them, to keep her eye on them, to keep them safe." While humans fulfilled their treaty relationships by treating the panthers and the land with respect, gratitude and love, balance was achieved and human and nonhuman societies lived together in peace. But now, Sisa tells us "that humans have broken their covenant with the animals, their original word, [and] their own sacred law," and thus she "is doomed" (190). As human beings forget their cosmologies and the socio-critical thinking embedded in their stories, they overlook their relationship with First Woman and neglect their treaties with the non-human world. Remembering how admirable her relatives the humans once were, Sisa laments that the world has grown small, that it has "lost its power and given way to highways and streets of towns where once there were woods and fens and bodies of water" (191). These new things have made the world less, she says, and because of this "humans have lost the chance to be whole and joyous, reverent and alive. They live in square lots, apart even from one another. What they've forgotten is large and immense, and what they remember is only a small, narrow hopelessness" (191). This bleak reality describes a world of humans removed from the teachings of the *hiya*

yálgî, which promote a reciprocal relationship between all of the elements and forces of the universe. The cost of such displacement effects humans, animals, and the land.

When she sees the emaciated, flea-bitten cat, Ama weeps "because once they were beautiful and large and powerful." Now, Omi thinks, it is like me "trying so hard to stay out of Herman's way … and it is like the cut-up land, too, and I see that this is what has become of us, of all three of us here. We are diminished and endangered" (69). This is the legacy of colonization, of capitalist priorities of greed, wealth, and dominance: a world on fire. Ama can see that the world is breaking, that people have forgotten their original instructions. She knows that "only 30 to 50 Florida panthers are thought to roam" Pahayokee, as "development has caused their habitats and populations to dwindle, and … about 65 percent of all panthers found dead in the past decade have been hit by cars along roads cutting through the panthers' Pahayokee habitat" (Renner n.p.). Concrete disrupts our connection to the land, and the ongoing abuse of our Mother troubles our relationship with her. Sisa sees that, separate from the land, humans are "pitiable and small and broken, and along with them, the panther people, too, are hungry and sick" (Hogan, *Power* 191). Thus, Ama uses the medicine gifted to her through her clan to perform a sending away of the panther (and ultimately, herself) in order to renew the world. I suggest that in this case, the creation history becomes a medium for the medicine. Ama knows that the Taiga can sing songs to kill a man; she knows there is power in story. Embodying the Taiga re-creation story is her medicine. The story is medicine. Ama uses the story to interact with the unseen forces of the world to show that she remembers her place in, relationships with, and responsibilities to the land and all its societies. She gives back energy that helps to rebalance the destruction wrought by human self-absorption. She not only tells the story – which has power in itself – she acts it out, using her body to weave the story into the fabric of her lived reality.

Going Through the Hole in the Sky

In a re-enactment of the Panther Woman story, the hurricane that surrounds Omi and Ama "opened a door. It tried to make over the world the way it wanted it to be" (95). The Storm opens a hole in the sky dome, recalling imagery from both the Rotinonhsonni and Seminole cosmologies. After this, Omi perceives a change in her environment, which makes her feel she is in another world. She thinks that "two worlds exist" or maybe "it's always been this way" but "I enter them both like I am two people. Above and below. Land and water. Now and then" (97). This perception of otherworldliness comes from Ama, who teaches Omi that "there are other worlds beside us all the time and every now and then we cross over and enter one, and every so often, too, one passes over and enters ours" (55). This feeling is affirmed for Omi when she looks up into the storm swept sky and sees "a hole in the sky, the way the old stories say about the hole pecked by a bird, a hole through which our older sister … Sisa … entered this world" (55). Their connection to the creation history is further affirmed when the two women go into the swamps after the panther. After hours of walking, they arrive "in the place where the stones look like backbone. Some people say this is God's back but we call it the Taiga Birthplace. In this place, the place of second creation … It could be another world, another time" (54). Inserting herself and Omi into the sacred stories and places of their people, Ama tracks the panther into the swamps. Following behind Ama and the panther, Omi literally walks in the tracks of her ancestors (both human and panther). When they catch up to the cat, Ama calls Omi to come stand beside her: "The cat looks up and she shows me to the cat, and what she does is, she introduces me to it, it to me. She says my name as she looks at me, as if I am both an offering and a friend" (65). Ama introduces Omi to her relative and ancestor from whom she's been displaced. In a sense, Ama also introduces Omi to the panther to show her that the teachings are

being passed onto the younger generations who need the world to keep on going, who show promise in being good human beings. Once Ama shoots Sisa, she performs the proper rites of respect and renewal, she "follow[s] the old traditions of caring for the hunted cat." She "made it a bed of leaves in a circle of twine," and "offered it tobacco and food…She even offered it pollen and corn, so its soul could eat before it left" (70). Sisa too, seems to understand her death as necessary. Because Ama is "the woman who still sang and spoke to her the way humans were meant to do, the woman who remembered that she, Sisa, was the grandmother, the eldest sister" of all the Taiga, Sisa meets with her willingly. Sisa hopes that the offering each of them makes will renew the world's "golden evening light" and "that the Taiga and the panther will recover and breathe again, that we all will sing once more in the swamps at night" (191-2). By expressing her love for the cat and taking care of it all the days of her life, Ama honours the covenant humans are meant to have with animals. By including herself in the medicine that sends away the panther and eventually herself, Ama acts as muskrat and Sisa do, she values the wellbeing and balance of the Creation above her own life. Embodying the teachings for Omi, Ama shows her how to be land- rather than self- or human-centered.

Like Atsi'tsiaka:yon and Sisa, Omi also goes through a painful transformation. Being present at the panther's death begins a process of inward falling for Omi. Like Atsi'tsiaka:yon's fall to the turtle's back, or muskrat's dive for earth, Omi falls from a known place (school, science, highways, houses, radio and church) to an unknown new world (place-thought, nonhuman agency, spirits). As she undergoes a shift away from cultural suicide and toward land-centered belief, Omi is harassed at school, abandoned by friends, and treated as immoral and mentally imbalanced by her family and community. While taking up the original knowledge of her people is for Omi a "new emergence" (to use Simpson's language), externally her shift in

thinking and behaviour is defined as failure, rebellion and madness. This dissent, however, is a crucial part of Omi's rebirth.

A Single Dissenting Being

In a sad display of irony, Ama is tried according to Western law for killing an endangered species, when that same law condones conditions – highways, pesticides, man-made flooding, tagging – that are responsible for a much greater number of panther deaths. While it is illegal to kill panthers because the settler government has categorized them as endangered, the same government finds it perfectly acceptable to destroy the eco-system that the panther depends upon for survival. Omi learns firsthand that "sugarcane and cattle and white houses with red roofs had killed the land and the panther people … they are the true violators" (114). While Ama stands on trial, Omi recalls the "boys driving through the place in their swamp buggies killing the land" and that "the men wouldn't hold up so much as a finger to stop them" (125). Ama saved a panther from such a group of boys who chased the cat up a tree with a gun. Even those who are self-pronounced panther specialists, the biologists and environmentalists who study the cats, kill more panthers than Ama. One panther tagged by biologists "died by drowning in water after a drug was released into its neck. Another outgrew its collar and choked. One reacted to the drug" (119). Since men built a highway right through the panthers' territory, dozens have been killed by cars (123). As Omi comes to understand, the "idea of the panther is loved while the animal itself is hated, unwanted" (105). Echoing ongoing battles over the stereotypical and incendiary use of Indigenous mascots for sports teams, Omi realizes that panthers are "mascots, nothing more." "No one wants them around, but they like to see them just the same," thinks Omi. "They just don't want them out there by their places. They don't want to have to look over their shoulder everywhere they go. They say the cats follow people. They've never been known to

hurt one person yet, but they will follow you. And no one wants them to eat cattle or dogs. There's no place human wants will let them be" (123). While Floridians like the idea of a past, romanticized panther, real, living panthers are undesirable and inconvenient. It is against this human-centrism and its terrifying apathy that Ama dissents when she kills the panther.

When muskrat offers to dive to the bottom of the ocean to try and retrieve earth for Atsi'tsiaka:yon to create Turtle Island, the other animals laugh and taunt him. They ridicule his offer because they think he is not as strong or fast as they are and so has nothing to offer. Muskrat ignores these naysayers and ultimately is the one to achieve what they could not. His dissent against the common opinion of the group is responsible for the creation of our world. As Leanne Simpson explains:

> Each of us having to struggle and sacrifice to achieve re-creation is not an easy process. We each need to bring that earth to the surface, to our community, with the intent of transformation. Colonization has shattered the fabric of our nation to such an extent that each of us must be Zhaashkoonh [muskrat]; each of us must struggle down through the vast expanse of water to retrieve our handful of dirt. (Simpson, *Dancing* 69)

What this tells us is that dissent is not new, nor is it anti-traditional. In fact, Simpson writes, dissent was

> a normal and a critical part of decision-making processes in all levels of social organization. A plurality of individual truths within a common context provided people with the ability to express themselves and their opinions in a way that simultaneously protected the experience of the individual within the consciousness of the collective. In this way, individual dissent could easily and respectfully be encoded within Indigenous

> political and intellectual traditions. The oral traditions of Indigenous nations are rich with stories of a single dissenting being, influencing and mobilizing the masses. (*Dancing* 86)

Ama kills the panther in an enactment of the Taiga re-creation story that generates the power necessary for the renewal of both Omi and the world. Though the killing of the panther is wrong, it is a necessary wrong to empower the dissent against forces that are killing our world. Omi learns socio-critical Taiga thought from this immersive experience. Her thinking changes and she begins to openly challenge settler capitalist priorities. Like muskrat, Omishto dissents against what people think she is capable of and the kind of life she is expected to have. She shifts away from Western education, Christianity, technology, and even her family, who want her to conform to a settler capitalist lifestyle. By inserting themselves into the re-creation history, killing the panther, and accepting the consequences for their actions, Ama and Omishto dive down like muskrat and dissent against settler capitalist priorities. Their actions point out the hypocritical western laws that make the hunting of Sisa illegal, but condone the destruction of her habitat and other threats to her life, such as highways, electronic tagging, and pesticide pollution from agricultural runoff. Before the storm, the uprooting of Methuselah, and the panther's death, Omishto dismisses Taiga knowledge, values and lifeways in the face of Western facts, technology and socioeconomic systems. Her presence at the killing of the panther and at Ama's trial leads her to challenge Western laws and expectations for assimilation. In what she describes as an inward falling, Omi gains new insight that strengthens her Taiga identity. Thus, Ama and Omi exemplify Heath Justice's argument that Indigenous heritage, consciousness, and epistemologies have survived in large part because they challenge Eurocentric priorities (149-50). When asked if she believes as Ama does that the sacrifice of the panther was necessary to save the world, Omi at first denies her belief, but then realizes with surprise that she does

"believe what Ama believes," that she has "been lying, even to [her]self" (Hogan, *Power* 128). Dismayed, she realizes that all her life she has "learned time, history, division and subtraction, sentences and documents that were lies." She wants to weep as understanding comes to her that she has learned "the wrong things" (130). While being her own creation story allows Omi to re-evaluate her priorities and to take back self-definition, this process is read by her family, community, and the state as unreasonable rebellion against law, logic, and her own best interests. As Simpson explains, dissent is problematic in a colonial context "because it frames Indigenous Peoples as a minority in relation to normative colonial 'truth'" when in fact "we are not dissenting, mobilizing, resisting or creating controversy to 'win' superiority or to dominate settler society. We are advocating and building a resurgence in order to provide the best political and cultural context for the lives of our people to flourish" (*Dancing* 87). While the state and Omi's family perceive her actions as a power-struggle, in fact Omi is not trying to shame, reject or take anything from them; rather, she is, as Justice puts it, shifting away from the cultural suicide they have required of her and towards a Taiga and land-centered self-definition. In line with the goals Simpson outlines as part of traditions of dissent, Ama and Omi aim to "restore balance, justice and good health to our lands and our peoples and to have good relations with settler governments and peoples based on respect for our sovereignty, independence and jurisdiction over our territories" (Simpson, *Dancing* 87). Whether intentionally or not, their sending away of the panther acts as a "disruption of the capitalist industrial complex and the colonial gender system (and a multitude of other institutions and systems) within settler nations by challenging the very foundation of the nation-state and its relationships to the land and Indigenous nations" (*Dancing* 87). In a sense, Hogan also dissents against the nation-state by

challenging the myth that the Maskókî were conquered or vanished, leaving the southeastern States open for the taking.

If we accept that the Taiga nation represent, at least in part, the Seminoles of Florida, then Omi's resurgence and reconnection to *entsitewatahkhwennyon:ko* through creation and re-creation histories asserts present-day Seminoles as direct descendants of Maskókî ancestors who were born, lived, and died on Maskókî lands (*e.g.* Pahayokee). Hogan refuses the myth of conquest and the vanishing Indian that colonizers use to justify theft of land and resources, and denial of Seminole sovereignty. The myth that present day Seminoles are non-Indigenous natives gets challenged by showing Omi recontextualized within relationships to both ancestors and future generations. Her rebirth mirrors the process the Seminole Maskókî went through – a process of cultural continuity but great social change – that proves their ever-present inhabitation of the land. She, like them, bends in the wind; she transforms and changes to survive, but her roots remain intact. The culture remains intact. In fact, this adaptation is traditional; it is fundamentally a part of Seminole cosmologies. Omi inserts herself into the creation history and thus performs an act of resistance and resurgence to enable a new emergence both of herself and of her people. In this new emergence, she doesn't need to assert cultural purity and refuse all forms of modern living. She can make the heart of her many belongings strong with its connection to Oni (Breath Giver), while simultaneously allowing new allegiances, forms of belonging, and identity to form in outward concentric circles.[38] It's the heart that needs rebuilding, that was gutted by colonialism. Once that center reasserts itself by Omi rebuilding her relationships with Oni and Sisa, she can regain the equilibrium needed to survive in multiple

[38] While this image comes from Grasshopper's description of the Maskokálgî cosmology, it also mirrors Kahnewakeronon scholar Audra Simpson's description of "nested sovereignty;" the ability for sovereignty to exist within sovereignty. See, *Mohawk Interruptus* (10-11).

citizenships. By returning to herself through *entsitewatahkhwennyon:ko* (we go back on their tracks), Omi challenges the priorities of settler capitalism and asserts Indigenous resurgence and rebirth. She falls through the hole in the sky, dives down into unknown, dark waters, and brings the mud up from the bottom of the ocean so that the seeds planted in her by ancestors long ago, can finally begin to grow.

Rebirth

Seeing Ama "break her own personal world apart" and "kill herself to set the world straight again" (Hogan, *Power* 125) convinces Omishto that the creation history, place-thought, and Sisa are "not just a matter of belief, but one of truth" (134). Carrying this truth within her, Omishto becomes aware that she is connected to all of Creation through Oni, the "living force" that "enters us all at birth and stays with us all through life," and "connects us to every other creature" (28). Her vision transformed from human- to land-centrism, Omishto gives thanks to Ama with whom she has "learned to read sky and water, land" (162). Because of Ama's sacrifice, Omishto recovers her "sense" of place-thought and her shared kinship with the land: "I am more, at this moment, than myself. I am them. I am the old. I am the land. I am Ama and the panther. It is all that I am. And I am not afraid anymore of the future or the past" (173). This enlargement of consciousness depicts the nested circles of kinship that Grasshopper uses to describe Maskokálgî thought- and life-ways. Ama's embodiment of the socio-critical teachings of the creation history help restore Omi's relationship with *Isákit' imisi*, Sisa, and her human relatives at Kili Swamp. From a Rotinonhsonni perspective, such a restoration signifies the resurgence of *kenten:ron* with Creation, a bond that produces *sken:nen* personally, and within the wider Creation. When Mama tries to get Omi to come back and live with her, Omi resists:

> ‘All along, Mama, it’s been someone else’s life I’ve been living. Other people’s lives. Now it is my own. From now it’s going to be mine.’ … All along I’ve lived in their world with order and cleanliness and the many other instruments of despair. It has been my life. And now I want no share in it. I have just been born. (211-12)

By re-enacting the Taiga creation and re-creation stories, Omi learns that Sisa is her ancestor, that she is connected bodily to the land (take for example, the storm that lifts her mind above the negative thinking that prevented her from self-determination), and that she has a place in the world and the ability to positively influence change. Shifting away from the type of isolating life of self-hatred that her mother lives, Omi walks to Kili Swamp where the old people live. As she walks she sees the four messengers, *hiya yálgî*, who float above the ground singing songs and shaking turtle shell rattles. In a dream where Omi is “a green branch beginning to bloom, to grow something strong and human and alive,” she is granted the knowledge that the four women “are the future, not the past, like [she] first thought” (94). Leading her great granddaughters home, then, Omi goes to the only place where she can reclaim Taiga original knowledge.

In the last leg of her journey, Omi comes face to face with “the golden cat, large and with the tawny fur loose and healthy, lean-muscled” (232). In an enactment of the old people’s teaching about animal allies being born alongside us, the panther and Omi are reborn alongside one another. Despite this, Omi still feels “both at home and a foreigner” (161) at Kili Swamp. But rather than being stuck between understandings of herself as either cultivated (assimilated) or non-planted (native) dogwood, Omi is “home like a little tree with roots connected to these taller, older ones, reaching deep for water and mineral” (161). Just as seedling *yotsìtsyonte o:se* are nourished communally by ancestor trees, Omi finds her place in the world and balance within herself by reconnecting to *entsitewatahkhwennyon:ko*. Like Ama who lives halfway between

worlds, Omi does not return to some pure, cultural centre to renew the "authentic traditions" of a "dying people," she goes to Kili to learn how to be human like her ancestors who were respected by Sisa. She returns to learn how to walk in their tracks. To return to the Rotinonhsonni metaphor, Omi still has a foot in two canoes, she still lives halfway between worlds, but she prioritizes different values, thinking and behaviour. As I believe the cycles of birth, death and rebirth from the creation histories tell us, our cultures are not static, they adapt and transform. Hogan attests to this herself in a 2011 interview with Summer Harrison:

> Tradition is about how you think about the world and how you behave within the world. And you don't have to have the language, you don't have to dress differently or anything, to be a traditionally-minded Indian person. But the Western mindset is so pervasive that you have to decolonize your own mind and heart and soul, and then reeducate yourself into understanding what tradition is. Understanding and loving the earth, this land we come from. And it's very hard for people to decolonize their minds and to re-indigenize. (*Sea Level* 168)

As Hogan says, being Indigenous is about how you think about the world (*ka'nikonhrí:yo*) and how you behave within the world (*ka'shatstenhsera*). Embodying the creation history allows Omi to loosen the all-pervasive influence of the settler capitalist world, and to also question staunch tradition. Ama sacrifices the panther in the right way, but she does not bring the hide to the old people at Kili. She protects the elders from seeing the poor condition of the cat, because "if they saw the face of it, that skinny cat dead on the black grasses, they would no longer believe or have hope," it would "cut their world in half. It would break their hearts and lives. It would take away everything that they have left in this world" (Hogan, *Power* 166). Instead of hope and renewal, Ama knows if "she gave it to them it would have been like giving them

sickness and death. If they had seen it, it would have broken their poor old hearts that have already seen so much misery," and they would "lie down on the ground and never get up again in this world" (166-7). By refusing to follow Taiga tradition blindly, Ama teaches that "questioning tradition by seeking the roots of tradition may be a more liberatory strategy for discovering a life- affirming way of living on this earth that has always been the oldest tradition of all" (Gaard 89). It is not about choosing "pure tradition" or "corrupt modernity," it's about what is in your heart. Embodying the re-creation history gives Omi the courage to return to the old people even though she doesn't speak the language, or know the customs, or agree with their banishment of Ama. She has been (re)placed into the tracks of her ancestors and of those faces yet to come. Returning to herself in this way gives her the strength and love to dance on the Turtle's back, and to sing "the song that says the world will go on living" (235).

Yotsìtsyonte o:se spoke to me about birth, about understanding my body as a site of creation and re-creation, and about inserting myself into the cosmology of my people. Within the Rotinonhsonni cosmology, *yotsìtsyonte o:se* also represents cycles of life, death, and rebirth, which I understand as a message about carrying forward ancestral ways into new realities (*e.g.* red osier dogwood, yellow dogtooth violet, and flowering dogwood are all re-created on earth in a reflection of plants from the sky world). As Indigenous people, we, like Atsi'tsiaka:yon, have been forced into a new world and it's important that we, like her and Shonkwaia'tishon after her, bring with us, or re-create the most important things from our former world. So like Atsi'tsiaka:yon brings strawberries and tobacco, and Shonkwaia'tishon creates medicines, animals, plants, and many other beings in our world that are similar to those in the sky world, but also different and unique to here, we must also do this with our knowledge, our heritage, our languages, and stories. We can carry forward the essence of these things, but allow for their

dynamism to unfold, too. When our epistemologies adapt to new realities and needs, this doesn't mean a loss of "pure" or "authentic" culture, it is in fact traditional for these things to adapt; they go through cycles of life, death, and rebirth. Some, like Christopher Teuton, argue that this is part of the brilliance of Indigenous practices of "recording" important stories, histories, and agreements in both oral and graphic forms:

> Native American forms of signification actively engage presence and absence through two interdependent and reciprocal modes of communication, the oral and the graphic. In doing this Native American signification attempts to avoid the pitfalls that both oral and graphic modes of communication are prone to in isolation, most notably the ephemeral nature of orality and the static nature of graphic forms. (30-31)

Like our cosmology that teaches us that life in this world is not permanent, that "all living things will die and be transformed" (Sotsisowah, *Iroquois* vii) and that it must be so because "human life could not have come to exist were it not for the wonderful process of renewal" (vii), Indigenous knowledge and culture also exists within a continuous state of renewal (rebirth). This is reflected in the teaching that whoever takes up our matters (*orì:wa*) will find different and particular meaning within them depending on who they are and the circumstances of their lives. It is up to each of us to try and unfold the meaning of our original knowledges and apply them to our daily lives. Thus, I understand *yotsìtsyonte o:se's* message to be about going back on the tracks of our ancestors (those who have passed on and are in the ground; death), taking up and applying their original (living) knowledges and the practices that reinforce the teachings, and then passing them on to our children who will carry our ways and matters into the future (rebirth). This is a cyclical process that begins and ends in the earth; the earth is where our ancestors go once they've passed on, and it is where the faces of new generations emerge. Omi,

who is disconnected from her ancestors, her people's past, and her own origins, as well as from any positive vision of a future for herself, her people, or the world, lives in a deterritorialized limbo of exile and placelessness. She can't return to a pure past of Taiga culture, nor can she abandon her Taiga-ness and embrace settler capitalism. Omi is unable to see any alternatives to these two options until Ama and the panther reconnect her to Taiga cosmologies, and the resilience they offer through teaching Omi adaptability. Reborn into a worldview of cosmogonic interrelation, Omi realizes that she carries *Isákit' imisi* within her center, that she is an embodiment of the energy of Creation and therefore not exiled or alone. A trans-Indigenous moment presents itself here, as Sotsisowah's explanation of the role of Rotinonhsonni cosmologies is helpful in interpreting Omi's rebirth. Sotsisowah writes that the purpose of cosmologies is

> to give human beings an identity relative to the forces of the universe, beginning with the individual and radiating out to the earth, plants, animals, trees, birds, winds, sun, moon, stars, and the spirits which created life on the earth. The Haudenosaunee religion calls upon the Haudenosaunee to reenact the ceremonies which represent the relationships to the Creation. (Sotsisowah, *Iroquois* x)

By hunting and "sending away" the panther – a reenactment of the Taiga history of re-creation – Omi comes to know herself through her shared kinship with the land. She is kin to the panther, and a great-great granddaughter of those humans who Sisa looked upon as beautiful and full of grace. Omi also recovers a sense of empowerment through cosmological knowledge. Witness to Ama's whole-hearted conviction in the realness of Taiga cosmologies and the power that is within Sisa, the very fabric of the universe (which Omi sees materialize, open, and welcome her), and every other living being in creation, including her, Omi realizes she does not need a

benevolent and all-powerful god to save her (as Mama does, for example). Enacting a ceremony of re-creation emplaces Omi within the extended kinship network of her relations (in particular, within the Panther Clan) and grants her awareness of her own sacred being, her own power to recreate. She has the power to help herself, her people, Sisa, and the earth by honouring human's "covenant with the animals, their original word, their own sacred law" (Hogan, *Power* 190). From a Rotinonhsonni perspective, this covenant consists of our original instructions to walk gently on the earth, to live in harmony with life, to show our gratitude for all that has been provided for us, and to teach our children the stories that will instruct them, in turn, how to honour this covenant. It seems that for the Taiga – who Sisa remembers as having breath and voices like the wind" and who could sing so "the whole world rejoiced with their voices" (191) – honouring sacred law means using the power of sound, words, story, and song to "keep the world alive" (14). While I acknowledge the real power of words for influencing reality, I also interpret the power attributed to song here as echoing Sotsisowah's words, referenced above, about the role of stories in generating landed consciousness. Thus I read Omi's journey to learn these powerful songs from the old people at Kili Swamp as a sign of her own re-awakened landed consciousness, and her ability to adopt a fluid identity in reflection of the transformation and adaptability represented in Taiga cosmologies.

Chapter Two

Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* and Western Redcedar

PART 1 ~ Reading *Onen'takwenhten:sera*

Oh, the cedar tree!

If mankind in his infancy had prayed for the perfect substance for all material and aesthetic needs, an indulgent god could have provided nothing better.

~ Bill Reid, *Out of the Silence*

As my plane descends over Vancouver, I watch the land become more and more recognizable. Stanley Park becomes obvious at once, its green expanse stark against the ocean and the blushing glass of Coal Harbour's high-rises. My eyes follow the blue line of Lion's Gate Bridge as it emerges out of the forest and sweeps across Burrard Inlet. Tracing the uneven contours of the coast along North and then West Vancouver, I search for the peninsula of Lighthouse Park – the place I've come to visit. Shaped like a roughly hewn arrowhead, the uninterrupted green of the park is easily identifiable from the sky. Old-growth *onen'takwenhten:sera* makes up a considerable amount of that green. I have flown 3,364 kilometers to visit the trees that have such presence in the literary landscape of Eden Robinson's novel, *Monkey Beach*.

After an interview I conducted with Robinson in February of 2017, she told me that the relationship between her people, the Haisla and Heiltsuk, and the old-growth redcedar of their traditional territories, necessitates meticulous care. Thousands of years of intimacy between the

Haisla and the redcedar nation have taught the people that anyone seeking to fell a tree for the purposes of carving a totem pole or a canoe must first show proper respect to, and ask for the protection of, the redcedar spirit. Carvers who disregard the aliveness and agency of the redcedar spirit risk being crushed by a spontaneously falling branch or by a severed trunk that falls in the wrong direction. Hearing her speak so vividly of the personality of *onen'takwenhten:sera* and her people's experiences interacting with that personality, convinced me of the necessity of travelling to the west coast to interact with these trees directly. The little redcedar spirit of *Monkey Beach*, with his bark face, earth-toned clothing, and premonitory visits to the novel's protagonist, Lisamarie, represents a strong, place-based relationship between Haisla peoples and the redcedar nation of their traditional territories. It is important to me, therefore, to recognize this place-based relationship by applying my tree-reading methods to a western redcedar tree, rather than an eastern white cedar, for example.[39]

After a forty-minute cab ride from YVR to my hotel in Burnaby, I quickly drop off my suitcase, shoulder my backpack, and head for the skytrain station. It takes an hour and a half by public transit to go from Burnaby to Lighthouse Park in West Vancouver. First, from the Metrotown station, I catch the skytrain going West. I disembark eight stops later at Granville station in downtown Vancouver. From there I walk up an endless number of stairs to emerge on West Georgia Street (six blocks East from where I used to live) and stand in front of the HBC department store where I wait in a line halfway down the block for the 250 Horseshoe Bay bus. When it arrives, I scurry on with dozens of other folks and am squeezed into a standing position

[39] I recognize that Lighthouse Park is not traditional Xa'isla territory. Initially, my hope was to take Eden Robinson up on an offer to visit her hometown and the redcedars of her childhood; however, scheduling, financial, and timing limitations kept me in the Vancouver area. While I did not get to interact directly with the specific trees that Robinson and other Haisla interact with, I did get to learn from the western redcedar (the same species of tree located at Kitamaat). Moreover, my previous relationships with the redcedar trees of Lighthouse Park and Stanley Park were an asset to the depth of my tree-readings.

at the very back of the bus right beside the overzealous heaters. As we haltingly make our way through the downtown core and toward West Van, my discomfort is assuaged by the sights of spring. I never noticed how many cherry and apple trees there are downtown, but they light up the city with pink, perfumed petals. I wasn't the only one to notice how otherworldly the clouds of blossoms are; groups of tourists pose for pictures beneath the bowers, trying to catch the floating petals like handfuls of snow.

The 250 crosses Lion's Gate and heads west along the seaside. The road is very narrow and winding. Multimillion dollar mansions – built on unceded Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish) territory – hug the steep embankment of the coast. Massive picture windows seem the popular feature – to frame the overwhelming expanse of the ocean I imagine. I watch the bus's stop announcements until it reads Beacon Lane, then pull the cord. As the bus drives off in a wave of exhaust, I cross the road and begin the short walk to the Park. Each of the homes I pass is from a fairy-tale. I wonder what kind of people live in them, and whether living in such a place next to the wild beauty of both the ocean and the forest makes them happier, better, or more alive than me. In the backyard of one of these homes, my eyes come to rest on the immense bole of a very old redcedar. Her trunk runs straight up for 160 metres uninterrupted by any branch before ending in a rounded crown. Another cedar stump, or snag as they are sometimes called, stands nearer to the road. Though she only stands now to the height of the power lines, I notice fondly that amongst the dense, dark moss hugging her bark several stems of a berry bush grow heartily. I wonder what it would be like to taste berries rooted in cedar.

Having been to Lighthouse Park many times when I lived in Vancouver between 2007 and 2010, I know already where I want to go. Entering the park, I am surprised at all the visitors until I recall that it is a Sunday and will therefore be a popular destination. Even so, the Park is

large enough that I don't often spot another human. The presence of people when I'm trying to learn from trees sometimes makes me feel self-conscious. Oftentimes, while I'm hugging a tree or resting my forehead against a trunk, strangers inquire whether I am okay. Once, while embracing a white pine, a woman told me I looked like I was holding on for dear life. It's hard for me not to think of humans as outside of nature. Thus, while I'm in the forest it is a habit of mine to try and block out the sounds of a highway, or people's voices, or signs of past human presence such as garbage. Through the course of this work I'm becoming increasingly aware that the trees I chose to work with are forested rather than urban. When asked about this in a public presentation of my research, I responded that I find it harder to connect to urban trees because there is so much distraction about. The audience member responded that perhaps urban trees are in more need of relationship-building than forested ones, as they experience more hardship. This is a line of questioning that I intend to pursue in future work, but for my present purposes, I will continue to work with forested trees while also trying to remind myself that humans and our habitats are not separate from nature, but part of it.

At the parking lot, I veer west and follow the Juniper Loop Trail. I head toward one of my favourite lookouts. This work that I am doing with trees – trying to hear them, be aware of their thoughts, and learn from them – has changed the way I physically interact with the land. Walking is no longer about progress along a trail, exercise, or achievement of any kind. It is not about goals, but about being. This means that I walk very slowly, stopping often to give my attention to small details. I do not follow a predetermined plan for moving through the forest, but follow instinct instead. Careful observation takes mindful movement. Finding a tree or a place that feels energetic to me, I will often stop, sit, and close my eyes, meditating on that energy and trying to expand my awareness of it. The question I carry in my mind as I walk is, what is it like

to be here? Both in the sense of what is it like for me to be in this place, and what is it like to be this place. The Musqueam call this point of land *xʷməq̓məq̓əs*,[40] and the Sḵwx̱wú7mesh call it *Sḵ'íẇitsut*, meaning "Go Around."[41] The earth here is tinted red from the decay of millennia old cedar, fir, and hemlock. It has just rained – and promises to again before long – so rivulets of run-off proceed ahead of me down the trail as it slopes toward the ocean. The ecology of the forest is diverse. I cannot tell the true bottom of the forest floor as fallen trees create lattice-work levels covered over in mosses, ferns, wildflowers and saplings growing from decaying logs. The ground here feels both soft and dense. It is spongy and saturated with rain. Sound travels differently. I hear bird song, dripping rain, and the crash of the ocean as if from inside a hollow log. It's been raining for several days and promises to for the whole week I've planned to stay. While at first, I feel disappointed that I won't have better weather, I change my mind when I realize I have an opportunity to learn more about the relationship between rain and cedar – the tree I've come to visit. The first thing I notice about rain and cedar is that the rain helps to release and carry the sweetness of cedar through the air. Cedar's aromatic scent is not only pleasurable, but an indication of its powerful medicine.

The Power of Cedar

In an online video produced by Aboriginal Students Health Services (ASHS) McMaster, Cree Elder Bertha Skye talks about the power of cedar.[42] She explains that "amongst tribes across Canada, cedar is one of the top highly recommended medications for different ailments that we have with our communities. For me it's very powerful and I use it quite a bit with my

[40] Musqueam Place Names Web Mapping Portal. http://www.musqueam.bc.ca/applications/map/index.html
[41] "Oh the Places You Should Know" project. https://www.kwiawtstelmexw.com/news/oh-the-places-you-should-know/
[42] May 12, 2011. https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=D7dEYpTY71s. As Bertha is Cree, it is possible that she is referring to prairie forms of cedar, which are distinct from western redcedar. Though different, eastern cedars are a close relative of western redcedar, and both have histories of medicinal use by Indigenous peoples.

medicines." Bertha uses cedar on herself to treat severe carpal tunnel that Western medicine advised would need surgery. Soaking her hands and wrists in cedar water and stretching them afterward has healed her condition.

In another story, Bertha relates how she treated a friend of hers dying from cancer with a cedar bath. "What possessed me to go get cedar?" she wonders. "I boiled it. She was on morphine. After she woke up I said I would like to give you a cedar bath. And, okay she said. Yes, I'll try anything." Trusting her instincts, Bertha poured the cedar into the tub. Her friend remarked at how good the cedar smelled. After her friend soaked in the water, Bertha tried to give her a massage but every time she placed her hands on her friend's lower spine (where she had a tumour) it burnt her. An Elder later told Bertha that she is gifted and if she had rubbed her friend's back and pulled out the heat she could have helped relieve some of the pressure and pain her friend was experiencing. After that Bertha pursued the medicinal use of cedar more, as she knew its power. Part of what I find so instructive about this story is that Bertha did not know about medicinal treatments using cedar before she bathed her friend. She listened to instinct – we could also call this place-thought, or cultural empiricism – and knowledge about cedar's medicinal powers came to her through acting upon those instincts, observing the effects, and asking others to help her interpret her experiences. I carry this process in my mind as I walk through Lighthouse Park, hoping to learn from some of the only remaining old-growth redcedar in Canada.

Lighthouse Park is home to West Vancouver's last standing first-growth Western redcedar trees. Most of the surrounding area has been logged but the park grounds were set aside in 1881 as the Lighthouse reserve. Some of these first-growth trees have grown to 200 feet and are approximately 500 years old. The Park's website reads: "This 75 hectare (185 acre) lush

virgin rainforest is located on the coastline of the Burrard Inlet in West Vancouver, BC Canada. It marks the point where the Burrard Inlet meets Howe Sound. Lighthouse Park receives more than 50 inches (1,300 mm) of rain annually." Producing an antifungal agent to protect itself against rot, redcedar thrives in this environment.

For each redcedar I encounter, I reintroduce myself and explain that I've come to learn. I spent many hours at Lighthouse Park in the past, but it has been several years since I was last here. I offer pinches of tobacco to each tree, thanking them for being, and asking if they might help me open myself to the forest. This request comes from a desire to be deeply emplaced, to be fully present, and immersed in my sensory experiences. While it seems simple in theory, this can sometimes be difficult. Rather than attend to the phenomenon around me, my mind will chase down anxious thoughts, or fixate on old memories. Sometimes even my sight seems to be impaired. I look at the forest around me, crane my neck to take in the towering heights of ancient trees, but without an emotional response I feel removed from the experience. My emotions let me know that I'm in tune with the forest. If I don't feel anything when I meet the trees, run my hands along age-old bark, and breath in their balm, then there is something keeping me from truly connecting. It almost feels like a veil, or a film that keeps me removed from true experience. It's like walking in my sleep, taking in colour, sound, and smells but without registering them in the rest of my self. This is why I ask the trees to help me be present and emplaced. Audrey Maracle, a Kanien'keha:ka clan mother from my longhouse, once told me that trees have far-reaching energy. Tree energy extends outward from the tree and can reach dozens of yards away. The older and bigger the tree, the larger the sphere of its energy. People driving on the highways, she told me, move through layers of tree energy and don't even realize it. In a sense, then, I asked the redcedars of Lighthouse Park to help me be aware of their energies.

As I move through the forest looking for the tell-tale stringy and fibrous bark of redcedar, I start to feel a sense of comradery with the trees. My experience is shaped by the practice of attending to each redcedar tree. Acknowledging each individual tree offers a sight that I don't usually have. It feels relational, like belonging (even temporarily) to a community. Imagine yourself walking down the street, greeting each person you meet, and finding them friendly and warm, familiar and happy to see you. As part of that community I begin to notice patterns in my redcedar neighbours. The canopy here is thick and the forest floor remains most often in shadow. This has led some of the young cedars – seeking sunlight, I assume – to grow in bends and elbows. I take a seat on the body of one tree that has grown horizontally for six or seven feet until finding sunlight and then abruptly turning upwards once more. I come across many ancestral redcedar stumps who have become nursery trees, feeding resources to new growth species who could use a leg up, as it were. There are also several examples of redcedars conjoined at their base. Dendrologists call this inosculation, when two trees fuse or graft together. While I cannot see redcedar's topmost branches, the lower branches swoop down in tiers. For trees young enough to still have branches growing near the ground, their strong, tensile withes curl inward. I notice that some of these spiralling boughs, having spooned downwards far enough to touch earth, have grown roots. Botanists often describe redcedar's foliage – evergreen, of course – as scale-leafed. If you look closely at each "scale," there are two, tiny sickle shaped lobes joined at the base that cup a centre stalk. At the tip of each of these lobes is a tiny barb (mucronate: ending abruptly in a short, sharp point or mucro). These scales grow in a flat, scalloped chain, forming long, slender, green fingers. They are decurrent (extending down the stem below the point of attachment), acuminate (tapering to a point), and glabrous (free from hair or down; smooth) ("Thuja" n.p.). Each of these fingers grows in opposite pairs, with

successive pairs at 90 degrees to each other. The foliage sprays are rounded above and flat underneath. They look like braids, three strands woven together to make a whole.

Reading *Onen'takwenhten:sera*

Hold the cedar spray from its base where it would attach to a larger branch, and in your other hand gently enfold the leaves and run your hand over the top of the foliage towards its tapered end. Feel how smooth it is, how satisfying it is to gather the strands together and then have them slip out of your grasp. Now do it again except brush your open hand along the bottom of the spray starting from the tips of the leaves towards the base of the branch. Feel how sharp the centre stalk is, how the barbs do not want you to move in this direction. This reads to me as a message about the paths we walk in life. A message reflected in redcedar's feather-like appearance.

Norma General once shared a teaching about the eagle feather in an ecological knowledge course I took with her at McMaster University. She showed us how when you stroke the feather upwards, all the strands of the feather stick together and your hand runs smoothly over a cohesive whole. Then, pulling apart some of the strands of the feather, she showed us how the feather can become ruffled, how rifts can form that endanger the quality and stability of the feather. As a metaphor for life and the choices we make, there is hope for the broken feather, she said, as even after it has been teased apart, it can usually be smoothed over once more into a unified path. In my mind, Basil Johnston offers a similar teaching in an Ojibway context.

Writing of the *Midewewin* (from *mino,* meaning good, and *daewaewin*, meaning hearted), Johnston explains that the medicine society studies both the nature of plants and that which constitutes a good life. Detailing the four orders or degrees that chosen initiates undergo to join the society, Johnston states that in the *Midewigun* (the purification lodge) stands "a cedar post,

cut alive, and erected as the tree of life. Known as the Midewatik, it represent[s] the world of the plant beings. At its base [are] placed the offerings of the candidate" (85). At the entrance to the *Midewigun*, the candidate is "met by four bears, emblematic of all that is good in life." As the initiate and their sponsor circle the lodge four times, they are "escorted by the four bears, who … remind and encourage the candidate" in the face of four other bears who "obstruc[t] and imped[e] the way" and represent "evils and temptations that the candidate [will] encounter in the moral order." Johnston writes:

> That the candidate would meet temptations in his life and career was depicted on the holy birch bark scrolls as a path with nine digressions and sometimes seven paths leading from life's main trail. According to the Midewewin, to digress from the true path and not return was tantamount to death. But digression was often only transitory, seldom permanent. It was for this reason that the members of the Midewewin were expected to retreat annually in vigil and prayer, to ask for guidance. During the retreat the medicine man reviewed his life to determine whether he was on the true path. Of temptations and evils, man was reminded by the hindering bears; of digressions and capacity for renewal, the candidate was reminded in the sacred scrolls. (86-7)

These teachings about finding one's path in life are reflected back to me in the pattern of redcedar's foliage sprays. The central branch is straight, and stands for the good life, for that path of the good mind, good action, and peace. From the perspective of my people, walking this path of *Kayanerekowa* means using *ka'nikonhrí:yo, ka'shatstenhsera*, and *sken:nen*. The fingers of each leaf are side paths taken in life. We can explore down these side paths, but it's our responsibility to always return to that central way of peace. These values are also reflected in the impression the leaves give of braids. In Anishinaabe teachings about sweetgrass braids, each of

the three strands represents the mind, body, and spirit. In my mind, this tells me that to walk the path of peace that redcedar embodies and communicates, it's necessary to consider all aspects of being, including the mind, body, and spirit. This message about finding a peaceful, unified path in life also seems to fit with the conditions of growth I see in redcedar. Those trees that grow in bends to create for themselves suitable conditions for a healthy life, those trees who fuse together, share resources, and support one another, and those trees that fall but nurse saplings, speak to me about resilience, adaptability, and generosity of spirit. These qualities are part of what enable redcedar to fulfill its original instructions to live in harmony with all other beings, and share its gifts with those who need them.

Walking in Stanley Park beneath the budding foliage of spring and the steadfast needles of evergreens, I watch the fog of my breath fold into the steam rising from Beaver Pond. Here is another place, like Lighthouse Park, that I will carry within me for all my days. There is a certain peace here that makes me feel reconciled with the thought of death. It's something to do with the cheerful play of the mallard ducks as they skim across the pond and tip their bums in the air as they dive for food. They make me think of my grandfather, Ernest Brown, who passed many years ago, and whose spirit seems to gently laugh in each honking call of the birds. Or maybe this peaceful feeling comes from the turtles I can see in the brown shallows, contentedly spinning their legs and soaking in the bent rays of the sun. They're kept company by frogs half buried in the mud who wear such convincing camouflage that I might not notice them if it weren't for their large, dark, blinking eyes and their pulsing throats. The abundance of growth surrounding me – of skunk cabbage, huckleberry and salmonberry bushes, salal, waterlilies, cedar, fir, and hemlock, to name a few – also evokes feelings of fulfilment, and I find comfort in the inevitability of all things returning to the mud that births such perfect life. To become a place

like this, that would be a peaceful end. In search of meaning to bring to bear on this dissertation, I wander amongst the trees paying special attention to each redcedar. I'm hoping for a moment of insight, but am also willfully trying to avoid projecting meaning onto the trees. I feel anxiety over the fact that there is so much riding on my ability to hear redcedar thoughts on this trip. I'm also aware that such anxiety will likely make being in-tune to place-thought difficult. I try to focus on the sounds of birdsong, of raindrops dripping from overhanging trees into the pond, and the crunch of fine gravel beneath my feet. I breathe deeply and encourage awareness of the humid scent of the forest, and the slight seaweed aroma traveling from the not distant ocean. Despite my best efforts to empty my mind and enter a state of receptiveness to more-than-human messages, I find myself repeatedly dwelling on feelings of grief. I realize that this trip is the first time I've been alone since my father died. I can't help but imagine him walking beside me, pointing out the mound of the beaver dam, telling me about his work training First Nations in Wraparound[43], and asking me about the dissertation. I'm deep in my own mind, recalling his moustached upper lip, and his goofy, kind nature when I notice a young redcedar along the side of the trail. I shuffle over, head bent, and rest my forehead against the fibrous bark. I stay like that for a few minutes, then, feeling self-conscious, I lift my gaze and notice an old rusted bike chain pulling down one of the tree's branches. Reaching out I carefully disentangle the ancient machinery, trying my utmost not to cause the tree any more distress. Finally successful, I watch in satisfaction as the branch springs back into its natural place, no longer weighted down by human refuse. I leave the chain on the side of the path and offer the tree some tobacco and kind words. I immediately feel good. Like performing this small good deed has opened a pathway for

[43] Wrap Canada seeks to support communities by connecting children, youth, adults and their families dealing with varied and complex problems to a network of local resources (e.g. individuals, associations, programs, etc.) so that they have better lives and can be active participants in their community (Debicki 7).

friendship. At that moment, I feel the impulse to collect a raindrop from redcedar's leaves on the tip of my finger and wipe it across my eyes. This feels so right that I do it again, wiping both eyes, ears, and my throat. I breathe a little easier then, and my footsteps as I walk away don't feel quite so heavy. It's not until much later, back in my hotel room as I slowly drift into sleep that I realize this exchange was an expression of tree-thought offered in reciprocity for a small act of kindness.

Northwest Coast nations have depended for millennia upon redcedar's generosity. In *Cedar: Tree of Life to the Northwest Coast Indians,* settler scholar Hilary Stewart details how the wood, bark, withes, and roots of the cedar provided tribes of the Northwest Coast with mats, cradles, canoes, paddles, fishing nets, hats, clothes, baskets, big houses, fish racks, cooking boxes, bentwood boxes, totem poles, ropes, masks, bowls and dishes, tools, and even diapers (17-18). Redcedars who have had their barked stripped are able to heal themselves. The leftover scars mark the trees as culturally modified trees (CMT). Redcedar's generosity also appears in Coast Salish oral histories that tell about the origins of the tree. In a story related to anthropologist Hilary Stewart by Bertha Peters and Wally Henry (Coast Salish), there once lived a good man who always gave away his belongings and food to others. The Creator recognized the man's kindness, and declared that once the man died "where he is buried, a cedar tree will grow and be useful to the people – the roots for baskets, the bark for clothing, the wood for shelter" (Stewart 27).

Redcedar's generosity and kindness also appear in the Henaksiala[44] history of how they learned to build canoes. My encounter with this history of how the Henaksiala became canoe

[44] The Xa'isla are a First Nation which resulted from the amalgamation of the Gitamaat and Henaksiala (or Gitlope) in 1948-9. These two groups were closely related and spoke the same language almost without geographical distinctions.

people comes from a report describing a seven-day boat trip from Kitamaat to Kitlope. The report, entitled "Living Landscapes," was created by a group of researchers, elders and community members of the Xa'isla people of Kitamaat Village.[45] The authors explain that "one of the purposes of this report is to give readers a sense of the cognitive maps that Haisla people have of the places we will be visiting. Haisla cognitive maps are like a cultural encyclopedia of cultural knowledge" (Ronaasen et al.). In relating the stories that paint this cognitive map, the authors instruct that "there are four types of sets of Haisla stories from the Time of Beginnings. Many of these take place in places we will visit in the course of this trip to the Kitlope." The first of the four sets of stories "tells how the physical features of Haisla territory and the living things came to have the features they do"; the second set "tells of the mischievous Wiget, who caused many, many things in the natural world"; a third set "has to do with how the clans came to be"; and the fourth set "has to do with parables based on the most important Haisla values" (Ronaasen et al.). This last set of stories, in particular, represent Xa'isla *nu'yem* – the traditional Xa'isla oral histories and laws of belief and behaviour – because "they illustrate the patterns of conduct and behaviour that are valued in the Haisla life" (Ronaasen et al.). I include here, a summary of the story about redcedar's gift of the canoe to the Henaksiala/Xa'isla (also the origin story of the Beaver Clan).

The story begins "a long time ago, during the time of beginnings, down in the Kitlope" (Ronaasen et al.) where the Henaksiala people were living well. They hunted, gathered, and fished according to the seasons and the gifts that each one brings. As they did not have any other means of travel, the people had to walk everywhere to collect sustenance for the community.

[45] Sheree Ronaasen (project research co-ordinator, lecturer), John R. Wilson (Xa'isla chief and elder), Beatrice "Bea" Wilson (Xa'isla elder), Vickie Jensen (Vancouver author and photographer), Jay Powell (retired UBC professor, Kitamaat Village Council ethnographic consultant), John Wilson, Jr. (punt captain), Chris Wilson (punt captain), Katherine, Allison and Ryan Stewart (nieces and nephews of John and Bea Wilson).

There were paths “along the Gardner Canal and along each of the important rivers” as “trip after trip carrying heavy burdens were necessary to put up food in the main villages” (Ronaasen et al.). The survival of the Henaksialia people required considerable hard work. One day, as they walked “along the path beside the Kitlope River near Dixdixninuxw,” they passed a grove of immense, old-growth cedars. Suddenly, a sub-chief heard a voice asking him if he enjoyed working so hard. The man looked around for the source of the voice but couldn’t see anyone. The voice repeated itself, “do you enjoy such hard work” it asked. Realization dawned on the sub-chief that it must be the voice of the huge cedar talking to him. Feeling a little foolish talking to a tree, the sub-chief decided to answer anyway. He explained that of course it was hard work that he did, but it was also necessary to survive the winter. With a friendly tone, the cedar replied: “If you give me one of your young men, I will teach him something that will help you. Bring him to me and instruct him to do as I say” (Ronaasen et al.). The sub-chief hurried back to his people’s camp and that night, called a clever young man to ask if he might be “willing to take on the task of learning what the cedar had to teach him” (Ronaasen et al.). The young man agreed, and moved with his wife to build a campsite near the grove of cedars. After introducing himself to the cedar, the young man was taught how to make adzes, knives, and splitting wedges, and how to carve a rough canoe. The cedar taught the young man everything he needed to know about how to make a canoe. The young man wasn’t very good with his new skill at first, but he worked very hard and diligently everyday, from dawn to dusk. His wife would inquire about where he went and what he did all day, but the young man wanted to make the first canoe by himself so he kept it a secret. One night, while her husband slept very deeply, his wife walked down the trail and saw the partially finished canoe. The woman

> wanted to help her husband, and the next night she felt the urge to get up and go work on the canoe. She looked at her body and felt changes happening. And she walked into the river and swam down to the worksite, guiding herself with her flat scaly tail. And when she got out of the river beside the canoe, she was able to work at hollowing out the canoe with her sharp twin incisor teeth. But, when morning came she appeared completely normal. (Ronaasen et al.)

This woman was the first member of the Henaksiala Beaver clan. When the young man returned to the site of his work the next day, he was surprised at how elegantly curved and hollowed out it appeared. As the days passed (and his wife continued to secretly work on the canoe during the night) the canoe began to look finished. The young man never realized what a contribution his wife made to the canoe's progress. When the sub-chief came with the other Henaksiala leaders to check on what the helpful cedar had taught the young man, "they were all amazed at the sleek, graceful canoe that would change [their] way of life so much" (Ronaasen et al.). This is the Henaksiala story that tells both of how the people came to have canoes and how the Beaver clan was founded.

This story of how the Henaksiala were gifted the canoe, exemplifies processes of landed pedagogy. Redcedar's attention is first drawn to the sub-chief by his willingness to work hard for the good of his people without complaint. While the sub-chief at first feels foolish talking to a tree, it seems his worldview provides him with knowledge that makes it possible for him to suspend disbelief and respond to the unknown and mysterious. The sub-chief attends to his relationship with redcedar and in return redcedar instructs him to provide a young man to receive teachings that will ease the burden of the people. This "reciprocal causality" – Battiste and Henderson's term for the mutual relationship between Indigenous peoples and the land, and the

ability of both parties to affect the other (43) – exemplifies Indigenous landed pedagogies: the land is our teacher. This exchange signals both literal communication from elements of nature, and subtler learning through careful observation. Redcedar can speak directly, or teach by interpretable example. That redcedar asks for a young man reads to me as a request for trust and reciprocity. As the sub-chief explains, it's imperative for the people to put up enough food for the winter. A strong, young back for carrying heavy loads would therefore be missed. By agreeing to provide redcedar with a young male to learn its ways, they signal to the tree their respect, trust, and humility. Rather than commanding the young man to learn from redcedar, the sub-chief asks (and perhaps persuades) the young man whether he'd be open to the experience, further demonstrating social values of respect, autonomy, and communication. Agreeing to become redcedar's student means the young man and his wife move to the grove and live there, suggesting a long, slow, emplaced process of learning. The young man introduces himself to redcedar, acknowledging the tree's agency and personhood, and appealing to the tree's greater knowledge and wisdom. Wanting to accomplish the task of making the canoe on his own, the young man progresses very slowly despite working from dawn until dusk. Perhaps not wanting her loved one to feel discouraged or defeated, the young man's wife feels compelled to help. Her desire to support her partner grants her the ability to do so, and she turns into a beaver. Embodying the characteristics that will come to mark members of the beaver clan, the woman works diligently, applying specialized knowledge (water dynamics) for the benefit of others (nor does she take any credit for this work). The beaver's role in the story may also mark a process of coming to know the technology necessary for steering the canoe (paddles imitate the beaver tail). Thus, like the Coast Salish history of redcedar's origins from a generous man, Xa'isla and

Henaksiala oral histories also portray redcedar as embodying principles of generosity, kindness, and reciprocity.

Recalling his grandfather's telling of this story of how redcedar gave the canoe to the Xa'isla, Gordon Robinson remembers it as occurring after the great flood, in which the Xa'isla people survived by creating redcedar canoes and anchoring them to the top of a mountain. "That red-cedar, it's made to use [by] those people that would live that time after the world flood" says Robinson. Wanting the people to share in its gifts, redcedar teaches them how to use its resources. "That tree turned to a person," explains Gordon. "They want a real human being to know what it is made for so … the red-cedar told the person that that's made for. [During] a certain time of the year you take the bark off. You can make a blanket out of it. You can make a coat out of it. You can use it for anything and can make a cover for your head" (in Compton 397-8). The language Robinson uses here – a real human being – evokes the Kanien'keha word *onkwehonwe*, meaning real or original people. In addition to its generalized meaning of Indigenous, and its more specific reference to the Rotinonhsonni, this term also implies someone who follows the original instructions of Shonkwaia'tishon, someone who lives in a good, peaceful way. Robinson's story, then, circles us back to my aesthetic reading of *onen'takwenhtensera* as symbolizing the healthy and unhealthy paths we can choose to walk in life. Not only does redcedar help Northwest Coast real peoples to find and walk that path in a material, physical way (by providing them with material for clothes, hats, mats, houses, canoes, ropes, blankets, tools, etc.) it also helps them in spiritual matters. The story of the G'psgolox totem pole provides an example.

The G'psgolox Pole

The story of the G'psgolox pole begins in Misk'usa, in the Kitlope Valley, the traditional home of the Henaksiala. The G'psgolox pole was carved and raised at Misk'usa in 1872. G'psgolox was the Eagle chief who commissioned the pole. "In Misk'usa, influenza, tuberculosis, and smallpox decimated the Henaksiala. Chief G'psgolox lost most of his family" (Totem 2003). G'psgolox "went into the forest and he was walking aimlessly he was in so much grief," narrates Louisa Smith, a direct descendent of G'psgolox.

> And he came upon a little man. And he asked him why he was so sad. What caused so much of his sorrow? And he told him that his family died, his children with the exception of his wife. And he didn't know it at the time but the person that he encountered was a mythical being and his name is Tsooda. And Tsooda told him to go back to where he buried his family. And at that time the burial was on top of the trees. And he was given a crystal. And was told, when you go at the base of the tree and before you call down your family you take a bite off of this crystal. And he did as he was instructed, he went back and he took a bite off of the crystal, and he called to his family to wake up, come down from where you are laying. And he was surprised when they all sat up and they were coming down from the tree top. And among his family was this little man that he encountered in the forest. And as a result of that encounter G'psgolox hired two raven chiefs to carve out the mythical being, Tsooda. (Totem 2003)

In the memory of Louisa's family, the pole was taken against the will of the people. Dan Paul, who holds the hereditary title of G'psgolox, says that the "pole was not a decoration, it was on top of a grave" and it was a "thing that should never be taken out. If it falls, if it falls you don't lift it, you let it go back to Mother Earth" (Totem 2003). As a mortuary pole meant to commemorate both the family of Chief G'psgolox and his encounter with Tsooda, the pole

"represents a vital link to their ancestral heritage. A link that was severed in 1929" when the pole was stolen (Totem 2003). Louisa Smith laments: "in order for our ancestors to rest peacefully everything must be in place, and since this pole was a mortuary pole you can use your imagination and feel what the Henaksiala and Haisla people felt with the pole being missing" (Totem 2003). Oral memory of the Henaksiala recounts that the people were out on a fishing expedition and when they returned the pole was gone. They did not know where it went until the 1980s when it appeared in a photograph at the Stockholm Museum of Ethnography. It was Olof Hanson, the Swedish consul in British Columbia, who – with the permission of the local Indian Agent – found, severed, and shipped the pole back to Stockholm in 1929. Thus, the G'psgolox pole "suffered a fate similar to that of many cultural objects removed from Canadian Indigenous peoples in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (Jessiman 59). When the G'psgolox pole arrived in Sweden, "totem poles were viewed as symbols of a 'dead' culture that had been overcome by a superior, civilizing force" (Jessiman 72).

The ancestors of the Henaksiala and Xa'isla urged their living descendants to find the pole. "It actually started with my brother Cecil Paul," Louisa Smith recalls. He "kept hearing our grandmother's voice to keep your ears open for the whereabouts of the old pole" (Blouinartinfo.com 2006). Eventually, Cecil Paul Sr. confirmed the location of G'psgolox in Sweden, and in 1991 a Xa'isla delegation including Louisa Smith, Gerald Amos (Xa'isla Chief Councillor), and John Pritchard (anthropologist) traveled to Stockholm to negotiate with the museum for the pole's repatriation. Finding the pole indoors, chained around its neck by a metal yoke and wires meant to hold it in place, the delegation wept openly and vowed to the pole and its spirits that they would free it and bring it home. Confronted with a painful visual reminder of Xa'isla people's history of colonial oppression, Gerald Amos expressed hope that repatriation of

the pole could be "one of the symbols that could heal the people" (Totem 2003). During the fifteen-year negotiation for the pole's return, the Xa'isla realized that taking their pole home without replacing it would recreate the very scenario in which the pole was originally taken, and so offered to replace the original G'psgolox with a replica. Per Kaks, director of the Museum of Ethnography, was greatly pleased with the offer for a replica: "It's very important to be able to tell this story, especially to the children, because they have this vulgar idea that totem poles were something where you tied up the enemies and threw axes at them" (Totem 2003). The Xa'isla's generous offer to carve a replica encouraged the Swedish government to decide, in 1994, to "gift" the pole to the Xa'isla on the condition (stipulated by the museum) that it be preserved in a climate-controlled facility. Such conditions were fiscally impossible for the Xa'isla to meet and so the return of the pole lagged. In the interim, the Xa'isla chose to stay true to their *nu'yem* and follow through on the carving of a replica pole. They also commissioned a new pole to be erected at Misk'usa, the original site of the G'psgolox pole.

In May 2000 the community gathered for the arrival of the two newly hewn redcedar trees that would become the replica for the Stockholm museum, and the new pole to stand at Misk'usa. With a folded cedar branch in his hand, an elder dipped the leaves in a small container of water and then sprayed the logs with it while uttering a blessing: "Mother Earth, we thank you for a great gift, we are cleansing you so you'll be pure in the journey that you will go in a far distant land" (Totem 2003). Renowned Xa'isla carver Henry Robertson, his nephews Derek and Barry Wilson, and granddaughter Tricia Wilson carved the replicas to stand at Misk'usa and Stockholm. The work brings up difficult memories for Robertson who recounts being caught secretly carving totem poles at residential school: "the principal got mad at me and slapped me around and told me I am not going to the school to learn to carve totem poles, the Indian ways, I

am going to the school to learn the white man's ways" (Totem 2003). He then proceeds to show the cameras the scars left over from where he was stabbed in the hand. When the poles are finished the community gathers to perform a ceremony to wake up the spirits of the pole. With the pole in the centre of the room, Robertson and others walk around it in a circle while expelling their breath toward the pole, giving breath to the spirits to wake them up. These efforts speak to Xa'isla knowledge about the agency of spirits in their lives. Jay Powell explains that the "history of Kemano traditional territory maintains a tradition of close contacts between the everyday world and the spirit world, as the people perceive it" (173). Moreover, in Xa'isla belief "there is a causative spiritual relationship between individuals doing the right thing (protecting, avoiding waste and being grateful) and having good outcomes" (198). For example, if the spirits are offended they can make it very difficult for a hunter or fisher to find their prey (27). This spirit agency also appears in the beliefs of the Xa'isla's neighbours (and former enemies) the Haida. Gii-dahl-guud-sliiaay (Terri-Lynn Williams) states that the Haida

> recognize that cultural objects possess their own spirits and the creator of these objects is only a medium through which our ancestors speak … Upon their creation, (and conceivably prior to their physical creation) ceremonial cultural objects such as Northwest Coast masks, rattles, dance blankets and regalia possess an independent 'life.' (Gii-dahl-guud-sliiaay 185-6)

To the Xa'isla, then, the return of G'psgolox is not only about repatriation of Xa'isla culture, but also about caring for and pleasing the spirits of ancestors. These Xa'isla epistemologies involving responsibilities to spirits thus inspire such comments as made by Derek Wilson, who claimed that "when the old pole comes back to our territory, it will bring back the spirit of our ancestors" (Totem 2003). Likewise, Gerald Amos claims that "the spirits of our ancestors are

waiting and will be very pleased when this totem pole comes home to where it belongs" (Totem 2007). This relationship with the spirits of ancestors leads Louisa Smith to describe the pole as holding "the invisible umbilical cord to our ancestors" (Totem 2003). In 2006, the old G'psgolox pole was finally flown to the Museum of Anthropology at UBC, and then subsequently moved to the Kitimat City Centre Mall, before returning to the Kitlope Valley and Mother Earth in 2012.

While the story of G'psgolox and Tsooda is literal and represents a real history for the Henaksiala and Xa'isla, it also carries helpful metaphoric meaning. The pole helped alleviate G'psgolox's grief by commemorating his family, by telling their story within the history of the people and their home, Misk'usa. As a storied method of commemorating and honouring lost loved ones, helping to alleviate the grief that comes with such loss, and acknowledging the power of the spirit world, the G'psgolox pole represents many of the teachings that are most familiar to me within the context of the Rotinonhsonni Condolence Ceremony. Though this practice is discussed more below, I provide here a brief synopsis.

The Condolence Ceremony

In the history of *Kayanerekowa*, Onöñda'gega' chief Hayenhwá:tha, like Chief G'psgolox, loses all his children and heads into the wilderness blinded by grief. Hayenhwá:tha feels that he cannot do the work of the good mind any longer, nor can he be around other people. Sitting on the earth, dejected, thoughts of how to make himself feel better come to Hayenhwá:tha. He begins to form, in his mind, a practice that will use strings of wampum and words of kindness, love, and comfort to help alleviate the burden of grief. When the Peacemaker comes across Hayenhwá:tha in his grief, he expands Hayenhwá:tha's practice into the Condolence Ceremony. The Condolence uses fourteen strands of wampum and each string addresses an aspect of grief, along with words that are meant to help the mourner heal or, at

least, to continue to live with their grief. The first three wampum are used to condole people through personal losses. These wampum address the wiping of the eyes, ears, and throat so the mourner can be returned to a state where they can see, hear, and speak. The next ten wampum address additional aspects of grief, many through metaphoric language, such as returning the mourner to sunlight. The last wampum is for installing a new chief. Like the G'psgolox pole, the Condolence Ceremony acknowledges the power that ancestors continue to have even in death, and helps to alleviate grief by emphasizing the living relatives who continue to care and support you. It ceremonially honours those who have passed on (as does the ten day and one-year feast), and it connects you to previous generations (through the carrying out of a ceremony that ancestors have also performed). Like the G'psgolox pole, ceremonies such as Condolence act as an umbilicus to our ancestors. Further, condolence connects the Rotinonhsonni to their oral histories of *Kayanerekowa* and the Peacemaker, carrying forward our epistemologies and cosmologies through continual enactment. This enactment affirms both a Rotinonhsonni past and a Rotinonhsonni future as it gestures to a living culture inherited from ancestors that continues and will continue to affirm our traditions of self-government and clan resiliency in the face of colonially imposed band council governments, patriarchal legislated identity, and state-sanctioned race-based violence. As both pole and perhaps, as the spirit Tsooda, redcedar helps the Henaksiala to cleanse their minds from grief, thereby acting as medicine for the spirit and mind as well as for the body (reaffirming the aesthetic reading of cedar's leaves as braids representative of body, mind, and spirit).[46]

Nakwelagila* & *Nu'yem

[46] While I could find no definitive information about the spirit Tsooda, he is described as a forest spirit. Given the significance of the redcedar as the "tree of life" to northwest coast nations, I submit the possibility that Tsooda is a cedar spirit.

In each of the avenues I follow to learn more about redcedar (*i.e*. aesthetic, oral, place-thought), I encounter teachings about generosity, reciprocity, healing, and especially – cleansing. Xa'isla scholar Kundoqk, Jacquie Green, associate professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Victoria, explains that cleansing for the Xa'isla

> is referred to as *Nakwelagila* which teaches the importance for cleansing inside and outside, mentally and physically. The old people have said the "strength of the medicine involves the power of the mind and that the mind is the backbone of our medicine" (Kitamaat Village Council, 2005, p 66). In this sense, the spiritual connection regulated our relationship to and with fishing and hunting and, consequently, our people prospered for many years with fish and wildlife. (Green 71)

In addition to encompassing a holistic view of health and well-being, this statement demonstrates a concept of medicine much more expansive than in Western traditions. The connection drawn between medicine and the mind demonstrates Xa'isla ontologies, which understand human thinking and behaviour as directly interfacing with a more-than-human world and the entities that populate that world. Thus, achieving a good, clean mind – and therefore, powerful medicine – increases one's chances of earning the reciprocated respect of the implicate order. Medicine in this usage, then, refers not only to a physical process of bringing about healing, but also to an ability granted by unseen forces or energies to influence outcomes through willpower, prayer, and behaviour. As one Xa'isla hunter describes it, *nakwelagila* is what the Xa'isla do "to become strong and tough and lucky by fasting and bathing in really cold water" (Powell 219). This ritual, usually done at the mouth of a river or creek, cleanses the *nakwelaa* (soul) so that someone who "pays attention to his nakwelagila can say, 'I don't look for good luck. Luck looks for me'" (Powell 219-220). Ronaasen et al. further elaborate:

> According to the Haisla *nuyem* (NOO-yuhm, 'traditional oral law'), the Creator, depending upon an individual's *hiliga* (hay-lee-GYAH, 'soul'), can be of help to people if inclined to do so. But, on the other hand, the Creator, can undermine, derail, oppose and jinx the efforts of those who are unworthy or incur the Creator's indignation, resentment or displeasure. Although traditional Haisla believe in an unformulated way that the power that humans draw on for strength and good luck is the power of the earth. The Creator and one's *nakwelagila* (NAH-kwuh-lah-gee-luh, 'cleansing by bathing in cold water') rituals enable humans to draw on the power to accomplish things and succeed in the activities they undertake. The Creator and the souls of animals and other living things are ingratiated by (a) respect and gratitude, by (b) people who are clean and moral, and by (c) those who take no more than they need and share the bounty with others, avoiding waste … The Creator, if offended, can cause the animals and fish to withhold themselves and cause even the lucky and talented to get skunked. Furthermore, the Creator, offended by a single individual, family, clan or non-Haisla business group could exact retribution against the entire Haisla tribe. So, we say that Haisla land, in general, is presumed by traditional Haisla to have a spirit presence is to put visitors to any particular site in Haisla territory on notice that traditional Haislas believe that their behaviour is being monitored by a spiritual power who can be either appreciative or vengeful. This suggests the traditional logic of the spiritual bond that links the Haisla to their territory and the living things in it. And, it may allow visitors in Haisla traditional territory to be more sensitive to Haisla perspectives. (Ronaasen et al)

This passage exemplifies Xa'isla concepts of spirit agency: proper conduct and respectful relationships with more-than-human beings including the Creator, spirits, animals, and the earth,

directly correlate to the well-being and prosperity of the people. In a sense then, the connection made previously between a cleansed mind and strong medicine implies the necessity of a good relationship with the earth. To have strong medicine one must have a powerful mind; to have a powerful mind, one must draw from the earth. This power cannot be taken forcibly however, but can only be earned through proper, respectful behaviour. *Nakwelagila* helps the people to have a good mind so they can take care of their relations in the natural world and fulfil their responsibilities to those relations, thus ensuring that those relations reciprocate and take care of the people.

Enacting *nakwelagila*, a "cleansing and strengthening ritual" (Powell 270) to "get your spirit in the right place" (Powell 161) is part of the process of enacting Xa'isla *nu'yem* (the traditional Xa'isla oral history and law of belief and behaviour) (Green 71; Ronaasen n.p.). Teaching Xa'isla *nu'yem* is achieved and ensured through storytelling. In *Sasquatch at Home*, Eden Robinson explains that *nusa* – the traditional way of teaching children Xa'isla protocols – gets transmitted through story. Robinson relates how she took her mother to Graceland where they visited the Presley Mansion: "as we walked slowly through the house and she touched the walls, everything had a story, a history. In each story was everything she valued and loved and wanted me to remember and carry with me. This is nusa" (Robinson, *Sasquatch* 12). As they travel by boat through the traditional territories of the Xa'isla and Henaksiala, the authors of "Living Landscapes" share stories of place that reaffirm specific teachings of their *nu'yem*:

> The Haisla nuyem is, essentially, a set of stories that include the origins of things and examples of characters and incidents displaying behaviour that is consistent with traditional Haisla values. There is a body of such Henaksiala cultural narratives, and we

> will give a number of them with regard to the places and settings in which they occurred here in the Kitlope. (Ronaasen n.p.)

Examples of these teachings include: to honour humans' responsibility to respect and protect other living things; to give help where it is needed; to return a favour, no matter how small and no matter how insignificant the being; and to never laugh at or mistreat other animals or other people as it comes back at you double. These stories reaffirm Xa'isla relationships to place (relationships guided by the protocols of *nu'yem*), thereby supporting their good thinking and providing them with good medicine to ensure the health and well-being of the people. For example, by specifically locating the story mentioned above of the founding of the Beaver clan (also the story in which the Xa'isla are gifted the canoe by redcedar) at Dixdixninuxw ("Owl hill") – a place still known and visited by the Xa'isla today – the landscape becomes storied and imbued with everything the Xa'isla value and love and want their future generations to remember and carry with them. This is also the case for the story of the G'psgolox pole which marks the history of Misk'usa and the peoples' relationship with the spirits of the forest at that specific village site. The pole acts as a visible, historical marker of the peoples' relationship with place; it emplaces their ancestral and ongoing presence. Gerald Vizenor writes that stories that emphasize survivance (survival and resistance) are an "active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry" (Vizenor, *Fugitive* 15). Distinct from survival, Vizenor's concept of survivance is a "moving beyond our basic survival in the face of overwhelming cultural genocide to create spaces of synthesis and renewal" (Vizenor, *Manifest* 53). Elsewhere, Vizenor writes, "Survivance is an intergenerational connection to an individual and collective sense of presence and resistance in personal experience and the word, or language, and particularly through stories. Intergenerational communication looks different in other communities, passing on a business,

trade, or profession, but in Native communities on this continent the knowledge of survivance is shared through stories" (Vizenor, Tuck & Yang 107). He continues,

> There is no way to know the outcome of survivance. It is a spirited resistance, a life force, not just anger, negative or destructive. Survivance is a force of nature, a new totem, and it has to be expressed and imagined to create a sense of presence. Survivance stands in contrast to concepts of absence and victimry that are frequently applied to Native communities. (Vizenor, Tuck & Yang 113)

Thus, storying landscape to convey *nu'yem* to future generations, fighting for the successful repatriation of the G'psgolox pole, and (re)mapping traditional Xa'isla territories in contemporary Indigenous literature exemplify survivance strategies for cleansing inside and outside, mentally and geographically, for the Xa'isla people. By (re)mapping traditional wa'wais territories, the Xa'isla affirm their ancestral presence on lands stolen and privatized by settlers, they confirm transmission of *nu'yem*, which supports practices such as *nakwelagila*, thereby contributing to the good minds and powerful medicine of the people. Gathering good medicine in this way helps the people to re-affirm their relationships with place despite the imposition of hydro dams, tankers, canneries, reservation borders, and liquefied natural gas facilities. As the G'psgolox pole helps to cleanse the people's minds from grief – first from the grief of an epidemic, then from the grief of colonialism and cultural lostness – redcedar offers teachings about using story to cleanse and heal. In *Spirit Transformed: A Journey from Tree to Totem*, Roy Vickers (Tsimshian, Haida and Heiltsuk) details the ceremonial process of taking the life of an eight-hundred-year-old redcedar:

> The Pacheenaht had a ceremony, which was performed in the forest while the tree was still living, at the place it had stood its entire life. It was beautiful. The ceremony was like

> a funeral. There was no celebration; it was a very sad time. The Pacheenaht said that there are two reasons we take the life of a tree. One is for a canoe, which is used to transport people in different ways – not only to move them physically, but also spiritually. The other time a tree is taken is to carve a pole. When I heard the voice of the man and woman who said the prayer and spoke to the tree, and when I thought of the lives that they have had and the pain they felt during the ceremony, it confirmed in me the belief that we should always give respect to every living thing around us. (Vickers 26)

Though the Pacheenaht are from Vancouver Island and a nation distinct from the Xa'isla and Henaksiala, their protocols for showing respect and caring to redcedar enact Xa'isla *nu'yem*. This ceremony also highlights redcedar's ability to – as exemplified by the G'psgolox pole – move the people spiritually, even through pain and grief. In the terms of survivance, redcedar not only helps heal the people from colonial trauma, but provides momentum for a cultural and spiritual resurgence.

* * * *

PART 2 ~ Spirit Agency & Living Landscapes: (Re)mapping as *Nakwelagila* in *Monkey Beach*

*"At the mouth of the Kitlope River, the boats pause. Each person reaches over the side and, one by one, washes their face. They re-introduce themselves to the living land. They clear away the past so they can see with new eyes." (*Robinson, *Sasquatch* 18*)*

Monkey Beach follows Lisamarie Hill in her journey – both geographic and spiritual – through the traditional waterways of her people, the Xa'isla, as she searches for her missing younger brother, Jimmy. Published in 2000, Eden Robinson's first full length novel, *Monkey Beach* is set in her hometown of Kitamaat Village, formerly Kitamaat Mission (also, Kitamaat 2 First Nations Reserve). Robinson, who is Beaver Clan from the Xa'isla and Heiltsuk nations, portrays tensions between Xa'isla visions of the land as *gukwas du bagwaiyas ganuxw* ("our land where we live and harvest what we need") and colonial cartographies represented, for example, by the predominantly white town of Kitimat (distinct from Kitamaat) and its aluminum smelter, the tower lines running along Walth Creek, the tankers in the Douglas Channel, and the Alcan hydro dam at Kemano. These tensions are reflected in the Xa'isla characters of the novel whose struggles with substance abuse, addiction, abuse, sexual assault, and suicide demonstrate parallels between colonized lands and colonized Indigenous bodies and minds.

Through cultural (re)mapping of traditional Xa'isla *wa'wais* areas, Lisa creates an internal cognitive map of Xa'isla epistemologies that provides her with the necessary literacies to begin to interpret her cultural and spiritual experiences.[47] Storying landscapes, picking berries, catching fish, preparing traditional Xa'isla foods, and even hunting for *b'gwus* all help to teach

[47] A *wa'wais* is a hereditary watershed area "owned by the person who holds the particular clan name which entails possession of the wa'wais" (Barbetti ii). Each *wa'wais* passes from generation to generation within the clan and is also "individually owned by a member of that clan who is the wa'wais owner's nameholder. There are 5 Haisla clans and 54 Haisla wa'waises" (ii).

Lisa the values of Xa'isla *nu'yem* that guide her in developing a good mind. Legacies of colonization – such as intergenerational trauma and grief, addictions, systemic violence, and cultural lostness – threaten this process of slowly illuminating her understanding. Both communal and personal trauma, pain, and grief entangle Lisa's spirit and her journey to come to know her gift with medicines.[48] Thus, in her journey to find her brother Jimmy she must learn first-hand the differences between good medicines that offer cleansing and healing, and bad medicines that amplify victimry, anger, and revenge. Ultimately, I argue that her experiences at Monkey Beach signify a process of *nakwelagila* in which Lisa's submersion into the icy waters of the ocean and subsequent journey to the land of the dead represent the ritual bathing of her *nakwelaa* (soul) so she can "get [her] spirit in the right place" (Powell 161). Evoking the symbology of the first three strings of wampum in the Rotinonhsonni Requickening Ceremony, this cleansing straightens Lisa's mind, reconnects her to the powers of the earth, and offers her condolence for her past suffering. Through this condoling process of cultural (re)mapping, renewal of *nu'yem*, and performance of *nakwelagila*, Lisa is able to use a good mind to empower her medicine in order to "build canoes" that will move the Xa'isla people in a spiritual and cultural resurgence.

Eclipsed Literacy

For Lisa, internalized colonialism becomes starkly apparent in the pathologizing interpretations of her "gift." Lisa's mother is utterly silent about her own abilities and the history of such powers in her maternal line, and though Lisa "[s]ometimes . . . want[s] to share [her] peculiar dreams with [her father]" (Robinson, *Monkey* 20), she is generally dissuaded by the

[48]As Lisa's great-grandmother was a powerful medicine woman (154), and her mother also "has it strong" (153), Lisa's gift – to predict the future, see spirits, the dead, and beings like *b'gwus* who exist halfway between our world and the spirit world – is positioned as a spiritual inheritance of "medicine."

disbelief she has come to expect: "when I bring [the dreams] up, [Dad] looks at me like I've taken off my shirt and danced topless in front of him" (20). Although Albert (Lisa's dad) did not go to residential school, his older siblings (Mick and Trudy) did. Thus, it's probable that both Albert and Gladys (Lisa's mom), who we can assume is roughly the same age as her husband, were raised as part of a generation whose parents often sought to protect their children from settler violence by denying them access to cultural knowledge. Contextualized within this history of supressing Indigeneity in order to survive, Albert and Gladys' unreceptiveness towards Lisa's encounters with spirits exemplifies colonial assimilation strategies. As her ability to see and communicate with the dead and to travel into the spirit world strengthens and Lisa begins to sleepwalk, she is increasingly treated as physiologically imbalanced. Doctors take her blood and spinal fluid looking for answers (267), and a psychiatrist diagnoses her ghost sightings as an invented response to death and grief that therapeutic treatments can cure: "I'm sure that with a little work, you'll be back to normal in no time" (274). Amidst repeated judgements of her experiences (and of her self) as abnormal, Ma-ma-oo is the only one who believes in the reality of Lisa's gift, and who points to her maternal ancestry as proof of spiritual inheritance (154).[49] Repeatedly told that her sightings of ghosts and spirits are not real or a sign of illness, and dropped into an epistemological darkness by colonial disruptions to intergenerational knowledge transmission, the youthful Lisa doesn't have the knowledge necessary for interpreting her experiences. Here, returning to Manulani Aluli Meyer's concept of culturally defined senses is helpful.

[49] Critical response to the novel itself mirrors this dynamic; many synopses and reviews describe Lisa's gifts as supernatural and the book itself as folkloric, mythic, or fantastical. I argue that neither is the case, it's imperative that both the histories represented in the novel and Lisa's gifts are understood as real, at the very least to the Xa'isla.

Meyer's conception of cultural empiricism attests to epistemologies that are literally grounded (in the earth, animals, and the ocean, for example) and can be accessed through a cultural expansion of the senses. Practicing Kanaka Maoli ideas found in ʻŌlelo Hawaiʻi (Native Hawaiian language) and expanding the senses through exposure to *'ike mo'olelo,'* ([Kanaka Maoli] stories and the consciousness) develops awareness of and the ability to interpret "noa huna (the secret insights from seen/unseen sources)" ("Spirit Revealed" 153). Put differently, the beliefs, values, and thinking carried in Kanaka Maoli language and stories develops an enriched inwardness, an illuminating vision of the quantum plenum (the very energy dense fabric of the universe). Within the context of *Monkey Beach*, Lisa has a predisposition to unseen sources that allows her to see ghosts, spirits, and other more-than-human beings without having the foundational language, stories, or teachings to interpret these encounters: she has an "eclipsed literacy" (Forsyth 222). Lisa's struggles with more-than-human speech present themselves from the beginning of the novel:

> Six crows sit in our greengage tree. Half-awake, I hear them speak to me in Haisla. *La'es*, they say, *La'es, la'es*. …
>
> La'es – Go down to the bottom of the ocean. The word means something else, but I can't remember what. (1)

Though Lisa's awareness of the natural world is augmented enough by her culture that she interprets the crows as intelligent and speaking to her, the epistemological frameworks necessary for a full translation or a response remain out of reach in her uninitiated state.

Lisa's struggles to remember the layered meanings of Xa'islak'ala (Xa'isla language) point to a further barrier in communicating with the more-than-human world. Ma-ma-oo tells her that to "really understand the old stories … you had to speak Haisla. She would tell me a new

Haisla word a day, and I'd memorize it. But, I thought dejectedly, even at one word a day, that was only 365 words a year, so I'd be an old woman by the time I could put sentences together" (211). An encouraged disbelief in her gift, colonially effected language loss, and the already confusing messages of the dead who "never come out and say what they mean" (17) force Lisa into an illiteracy that she doesn't know how to remedy. "Feeling unable to hear and respond adequately," to more-than-human communication, "Lisa holds herself responsible for the loss of loved ones – despite her proximity to Ma-ma-oo's teachings – and consequently experiences a sense of powerlessness" (Forsyth 225). Given the Xa'isla teaching that "the power that humans draw on for strength and good luck is the power of the earth" and that "*nakwelagila* … rituals enable humans to draw on the power to accomplish things and succeed in the activities they undertake" (Ronaasen et al.), I suggest that part of Lisa's eclipsed literacy lies in a disconnection from the earth, Creator, and her own *nakwelaa*. Settler colonial and capitalist impositions upon Xa'isla lands – such as the Joint Reserve Commission, established in 1875 by the governments of Canada and B.C. to fix boundaries of Native reserves in B.C. in order to purposefully extinguish "Aboriginal title" (a direct violation of the Royal Proclamation of 1763); the Hudson's Bay Company's acquisition and bounding of lands, and the 1849 Royal Charter granting Vancouver Island to the HBC (the precursor for the Douglas treaties); as well as more recent examples of neoliberal settler capitalism represented by the Kitimat liquefied natural gas facility, and Enbridge's attempts at installing the Northern Gateway Pipeline – impact both the environment and the Xa'isla people negatively. Thus, Lisa's grief over the loss of family members is compounded by a damaged relationship to the earth. Like the Xa'isla Nation who, according to their *nu'yem*, continue to be responsible for the health and well-being of their

traditional *wa'wais* areas despite settler or corporate presences which prevent their access and stewardship, Lisa is doubly burdened.

Spirit Agency

I argue that the cedar spirit who visits Lisa is an emissary for the tree nation and the land who seek to recruit Lisa for her abilities to communicate between human and more-than-human societies. As a form of embodied place-thought, the little man epitomizes Eve Tuck's assertion that "decolonization may be something the land does on its own behalf, even if humans are too deluded or delayed to make their own needed changes" (*Place* xv). This is not a concept far removed from Xa'isla epistemologies of spirit agency and *nu'yem*, which hold that offending spirits or the Creator through lack of respect or violation of protocols can lead to retribution from the land itself. For example, a fisherman who does not express proper gratitude for a successful catch or who takes more fish than he needs and thus proves himself wasteful, may find himself unable to catch another fish for years to come. In light of the changes to the environment surrounding the Douglas Channel wrought by, for example, the Alcan smelter, clear-cut timber and commercial fishing industries, and more systemic influences such as climate change, it's no wonder that the tree nation seeks a champion amongst Indigenous allies. That the little man appears to Lisa before something bad happens – such as a tidal wave, death, or serious illness – perhaps signifies an attempt both to protect human well-being, and to commiserate with the shared experience of loss, something redcedar knows only too well.

According to the David Suzuki Foundation report, "A Vanishing Heritage: the Loss of Ancient Red Cedar from Canada's Rainforests":

> Old-growth cedar, especially the largest, most-valuable trees, will disappear from the BC coast if the current methods of targeting these forests continue. And, the likelihood of this increases as the provincial government deregulates the forest industry and places more management control in the hands of timber companies. The incentive to log as much cedar as possible is tremendous as it is not anticipated that the market for high-quality cedar products will diminish. Unless the logging of cedar is more strictly regulated, we could soon see the disappearance of old-growth, leaving only the less-valuable second growth forests. (Nelson 24)

The high-grade method for removing cedar has timber companies logging large tracts of forest. Clear-cutting all the trees from these areas, called cutblocks, means that for "animal and plant species that require old-growth forests to survive, their habitat is lost forever" (Nelson 18). The report continues to warn that "removal of massive amounts of old-growth red cedar from Canada's rainforests will result in many species vital to the ecological integrity of coastal forest ecosystems becoming threatened and even endangered" (18). These are the forest nations living in Xa'isla *wa'waises*. Killing the redcedar trees of the coastal rainforest means killing the little cedar spirit. It is also an act of cultural attack, as the redcedar – the "tree of life" for Northwest Coast peoples – is a tree of collective, ancestral memory (take, for example, the hundreds of culturally modified trees in each *wa'wais* area),[50] and a means for cultural continuity through totems, canoes, masks, and regalia, for example. This violence against the land demonstrates Eurocentric philosophies that privilege humans (white, male, heterosexual humans in particular) with the right to dominate everything beneath them in a hierarchy of being, a philosophy that drives corporate economies and settler capitalism. Within Lisa's world, this violence manifests

[50] Culturally modified trees (CMT) are trees modified by Northwest Coast peoples as part of their tradition. A redcedar with strips of bark removed is a CMT, for example.

not only in the theft of land and resources from Xa'isla *wa'waises*, but also in the state-sanctioned violence that easily targets Indigenous women's bodies for the same violence, violation, and disposability.

Through what she calls the epistemological-ontological divide, Vanessa Watts-Powless explains how Euro-Western hierarchies of being separate humans from the rest of Creation based upon our ability to perceive, reason, and affect our environments. As a result, humankind thinks of itself as "elevated outside or above the natural world," which is incapable of self-awareness and agency (Watts 24). By re-affirming nonhumans as cognitive, empowered, and entitled to rights and protections, oral histories – such as Xa'isla stories of redcedar, the forest spirit Tsooda, *b'gwus*, and *Weegit* – directly contest philosophies of human superiority used to justify ownership and exploitation of lands, animals, and waterways. The little cedar spirit in *Monkey Beach*, therefore, represents spirit agency and affirms animals, spirits, and the land itself as members of society with direct influence in human realms. In other words, non-humans are mindful members of an organized social system who perceive reality and each other from their own perspectives, and who have the power to speak, act, and react autonomously and in doing so affect human experience and behaviour. Attributing such agency to animals, plants, spirits and the land itself suggests a view of Creation that revolves around interactions between these societies rather than solely amongst humans; it necessitates diplomacy with trees, grass, water, animal, and all non-human nations. Literary representations of non-human agency, then, remind us that the land is animate and has rights, and that, as extensions of the land, human and non-human societies have obligations and responsibilities to her and to each other. For the Xa'isla, this is the role *nu'yem* is meant to play, a set of protocols to ensure a balanced, interdependent co-habitation between all the earth's nations. This shared belonging to the land, or to use John

Borrows' term, this "landed citizenship" (138), requires consideration for the needs of all its social units, including plant, animal, mineral and spiritual orders. As Borrows explains, this societal unity "is important to citizenship because it allows people to build societies that are greater than the sum of their individual rights, associations, and identities. It facilitates the empathy, common concern, and compassion essential to the functioning of any civil society" (154). Put differently, a shared citizenship with the land must include a conception of social cohesion between its human, non-human and spiritual realms; it must follow Xa'isla *nu'yem*.

Understood through this lens, the little man's visits to Lisa can be read as an entreaty on the part of the redcedar nation, and perhaps other non-human nations as well (consider, for example, the participatory role the crows play in Lisa's journey), to help protect and heal relationships broken by settler capitalism. As an example of redcedar's generosity and expectation of reciprocity, the little man tries to prepare Lisa for incoming losses and comforts her in his own way (often through attempted humour). Read through the framework of Xa'isla oral histories of redcedar, I suggest that the little man's appearance before something bad happens is his way of signaling that Lisa is not alone, that she has many relations beyond her human family who love and care for her. Lisa, who initially sees the little man as "a variation of the monster under the bed or the thing in the closet, a nightmare that fade[s] with morning" (*Monkey* 27), doesn't have the interpretive frameworks that might help her understand his presence and intentions. Take for example, the history of Chief G'psgolox who was able to understand the forest spirit (perhaps even the redcedar spirit) Tsooda, become empowered by the knowledge shared with him, and use it for the betterment and healing of his people. With limited access to Xa'isla territories, or Xa'isla language and knowledge (signaled in the text primarily by reference to residential schooling), Lisa does not share her ancestor's comprehension of spirit visitors. This loss of

knowledge represents a common experience amongst many Indigenous people today. Without the stories of the origins of redcedar, the history of G'psgolox pole, or the story of how redcedar gifted the Henaksiala with the canoe, for example, Lisa is missing the interpretive intuition that such narratives might provide.

As Lisa and Ma-ma-oo's conversation about the little man demonstrates, modernizing contexts make it even more difficult to decipher the old ways. While gathering cedar branches, Ma-ma-oo offers words of thanks and some tobacco at the bottom of the cedar trunk. When Lisa asks her grandmother why she's giving the tree tobacco, Ma-ma-oo responds "the tobacco is for the tree spirits. You take something, you give something" (Robinson, *Monkey* 152). In this embodiment of Xa'isla *nu'yem*, Ma-ma-oo demonstrates the proper, respectful kind of relationship that I suggest the little man hopes to revive on a wider scale. Ma-ma-oo continues to explain that "the chief trees—the biggest, strongest, oldest ones—had a spirit, a little man with red hair. Olden days, they'd lead medicine men to the best trees to make canoes with'" (152). Asking her grandmother what it means that she has seen the little man, Ma-ma-oo replies, "Guess you're going to make canoes" (152). Both laugh at the very idea of this – since buying a modern speed boat is easier than hand-making a canoe – and Ma-ma-oo discounts the tradition as part of the old ways that "don't matter much now. Just hold you back" (153). Though they joke about Lisa making canoes, I suggest that this conversation and its gesture to the story of how redcedar taught the Henaksiala people to make canoes is pivotal for understanding the little man's intentions and the responsibilities that come with gifts like Lisa's. Recall that in his description of searching for a redcedar to transform into a totem, Haida-Heiltsuk carver Roy Vickers says that the Pacheenaht have only two reasons for taking the life of a tree: "One is for a canoe, which is used to transport people in different ways – *not only to move them physically, but*

also spiritually. The other time a tree is taken is to carve a pole" (emphasis added, Vickers 26). What is particularly prevalent to translating Lisa's gift is the tribe's assertion that canoes are not only for transporting people physically, but also spiritually. With this in mind, I propose that the little man shows himself to Lisa because she *is* meant to make canoes. She is meant to use the gifts that Creator gave her to carry and move – like a canoe – her people through processes of healing, cleansing, and cultural and spiritual resurgence. Even Ma-ma-oo, who is one of the only sources of traditional Xa'isla knowledge in the text, signals in her comment above about the obsolescence of the old ways that such resurgence would be an important gift for the community. Like the G'psgolox pole that first helped to condole the Henaksiala people after a smallpox epidemic, and then the Xa'isla people after generations of colonial impositions that saw the banning of their ceremonies, artifacts, and language, redcedar once more seeks to provide the people with means to cleanse their grief and heal. This is not only for the betterment of the people themselves, but also so they might have good minds to empower their actions and thereby honour their responsibilities to treat the natural world and all its societies with love, gratitude, and respect. The need for such work appears in the violence, loss, and anger that permeates the human community of Kitamaat, and that materializes in the bad medicine beings that ask Lisa for meat and blood in exchange for power.

New Epidemics and Atotarho

"Thy mind is made straight; thy head is now combed; the seven crooks have been taken from thy body. Now thou, too, hast a New Mind" (Wallace 64)

In the time of Chief G'psgolox, smallpox and influenza were the epidemics that threatened his people. In the Kitamaat community of 2000 represented in Robinson's novel, the new epidemics show themselves to be intergenerational trauma and unresolved grief, cultural

genocide, substance abuse, addictions, sexual assault, and both lateral (due to internalized colonialism) and systemic violence. Whereas the forest spirit Tsooda and the commissioned totem pole (which commemorated those lost and therefore helped those living to be condoled) helped Chief G'psgolox and the Henaksiala people to wipe away their grief and continue to function and take care of themselves and their relations, the community in Robinson's text struggle to find a means for restoring their minds and bodies. Here is where examining *Monkey Beach* through a trans-Indigenous framework of both Xa'isla and Rotinonhsonni traditions around loss, death, and grief can be especially illuminating.

Kanien'keha *royaner* Hayenhwá:tha ("he keeps them awake") sought to bring a message of peace to the twisted mind and body of Onöñda'gega' chieftain Atotarho. In response, Atotarho killed all three of Hayenhwá:tha's daughters. Rick Hill Sr. tells the story of how Hayenhwá:tha originated the tradition of condolence wampum among the Rotinonhsonni:

> Lost deep in the grief over the death of his daughters, Hyenwatha sat dejectedly in the dark woods. While his heart dropped to the ground, his mind was trying to ease his consternation. As he stared at the Mother Earth, special word-thoughts came to his mind. As he strung together tiny, tubular shell beads that he had found those word-thoughts began to fall into sequence, creating a rhythm of healing. "This would I do if I found anyone burdened with grief even as I am. I would take these shell strings in my hand and console them. The strings would become words and lift away the darkness with which they are covered. Holding these in my hand, my words would be true," Hyenwatha said to himself. At the edge of darkness, Hyenwatha condoled himself with the thoughts, words and actions he invented. Thus began a long-standing tradition of restoring sanity and sense of belonging among the Haudenosaunee…

> To this very day a man is appointed to speak those same words of healing for the sake of those who have been mourning the loss of a loved one … The speaker is helping people recover from their loss, renewing their spirit and lifting the mental anguish they have been burdened with. If he is expert with words and precise with his memory, he paints beautiful pictures in the minds of the mourners, using culturally-rich metaphors and the words that carry sympathy, empathy and hope. (Hill, *Restorative* n.p.)

The Condolence Ceremony is about returning strength and courage to the minds of those who have fallen to the ground in loss and grief. The Requickening Address, represented in the first three strings of wampum, has "the power to wipe away our tears so we can see how beautiful the world really is, and how much people really care for us;" it helps us to "recover our hearing so that we can experience the kind words of healing offered to us, as well as the voices of children as they move around us;" and it "clear[s] our throat[s] so that we can breathe with ease and comfort once again" (Hill, *Restorative* n.p). The word-thoughts that Hayenhwá:tha hears when he retreats into the forest are an example of place-thought: the internal communication of First Woman. She leads him into knowledge of the healing power of both wampum and the words that can restore reason and peace. This combination of oral story and material representation also appears in the story of the G'psgolox pole, in which the pole represents a history of loss that helps alleviate the burden of grief for survivors. However, consider what might have happened had Chief G'psgolox not encountered the forest spirit Tsooda and had his family restored to him. What might have happened if the Chief's grief and pain overwhelmed him and he had no recourse for being unburdened? The same questions apply to Hayenhwá:tha. When Atotarho sends bad medicine to make his daughters become ill and die, Hayenhwá:tha says, "I shall be unable to perform the work of the Good Mind … because of this awful thing that has befallen

me" (Wallace 52). What kind of person might Hayenhwá:tha have become without awareness of First Woman's word-thoughts and Peacemaker's performance of the condolence? I think perhaps we have an answer in the figure of Atotarho.

Atotarho, who readily uses bad medicines to hurt others, has a mind and body bent and twisted by victimry, hate, and alienation. Because he feeds upon negative thinking and hurtful actions (similar to Flint's thinking, in the creation story), Atotarho's body is crooked in seven places, his skin is covered over with scales, and his hair is twisted with snakes. While many accounts of Atotarho describe him as evil, I think this description requires some unpacking. If Atotarho were truly evil could he have been restored to a good mind? If he were evil would he have been chosen as a leader of the Great Peace? Just as I argue that the twins in the creation history should be read with more nuance than binaries of good and bad, I suggest that Atotarho also should be read more carefully. We have, in the creation history, an example of how grief can twist the mind. Atsi'tsiaka:yon who loses her world, her husband, mother, and brother and all of the sky world community, and who then also loses her daughter in childbirth, suffers from tremendous pain and loss. Such suffering manifests in her spurning of Sapling and the disrespect she shows towards his efforts for creating a good life. I suggest, therefore, that Atotarho's actions may be understood in a similar context, that he acts out of fear, anger, loneliness, and despair. This is why the Peacemaker's song of peace has an effect, and why he is eventually able to hear the words of peace, power, and righteousness. Had Hayenhwá:tha not been condoled by Peacemaker, perhaps his mind might also have turned to hatred and vengeance. Perhaps, instead of seeking to bring the message of peace to Atotarho, Hayenhwá:tha might have sought to kill him instead. While this hypothetical line of questioning might seem tangential, in fact it bears significance for understanding the hurtful actions of some of the community members of

Kitamaat Village in *Monkey Beach* and for understanding Lisa's entanglement with bad medicines.

The history of Hayenhwá:tha and Atotarho demonstrate the choices available to us after experiences of extreme trauma and grief, such as colonialism. While Lisa's struggles between these healthy and unhealthy choices materialize in the form of the little man (good medicine) and the blood-sucking worm/crab (bad medicine), for other characters the sickness of colonization appears in different choices. Robinson traces this sickness from its sources – primarily, in this case, residential school priests who "helped themselves to little kids" and "got away scot-free" (255) – to its intergenerational outcomes. Thus, Josh, who was raped by priests at the residential school, in turn rapes Karaoke, Pooch, and Tab. When Jimmy discovers that his soon-to-be fiancé, Karaoke, aborted a baby conceived unwillingly upon her by Josh, Jimmy takes Josh out on a boat, hits him over the head with a paddle, and drowns him (369).[51] Colonially instigated lateral violence appears again when Cheese drugs Lisa at a party and then rapes her. Imposed patriarchy through the *Indian Act*, prevention of traditional subsistence systems and forced dependence upon the government, and the simultaneous devaluing of land and Indigenous women generates systemic violence against Indigenous peoples in general and Indigenous women in particular. While a full analysis of these gendered colonial strategies is beyond the scope of this project, it should be noted that lateral violence is an extension of state-sanctioned violence and often a result of internalized racism. Robinson signals this environment of violence to be a common reality for her characters when Erica gets stalked and harassed by a group of young, white men who, when confronted by Lisa, call her a "feisty squaw" and a "bitch" who is

[51] Interestingly, this appears to echo an oral story recounted previously in the novel in which a woman knocks her husband over the head with a paddle and into the waters near Monkey Beach so she can have a relationship with her brother-in-law. The husband survives and makes it to Monkey Beach where he becomes a *b'gwus* and eventually kills his cheating wife and brother (211).

"begging for it" (250-1). Though these particular predators are chased off, we are reminded by Lisa's relatives that it is chance that saved her, not justice: "You would have been hurt or dead, and no one would have given a flying fuck" (255). This close encounter unfortunately gets realized near the end of the novel, when Tab is (most likely) raped and murdered by "a couple of boozehound rednecks" (301). That we do not know for sure Tab's fate is a sad reminder of the hundreds of Indigenous women who are missing and/or murdered in this country. Their families, too, often do not know. Systemic violence repeatedly gets signalled in the text, with Robinson drawing important connections between colonial assault and feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and self-harm (which includes, in an Indigenous context, harm of others). Thus, Pooch's time in child welfare, his return to the system upon the death of his grandmother, in addition to being sexually assaulted by Josh, are undoubtedly large contributing factors to his choice to shoot himself (312). Cataloguing the most common epidemics plaguing Indigenous reserves today, Robinson moves us through sexual assault, domestic violence, suicide, poverty, and substance abuse. Even Ba-ba-oo, Lisa's grandfather, who loses his arm fighting in the Second World War, is denied employment and support through Veterans Affairs when he returns home. The VA tells him that "Indian Affairs [is] taking care of him," but Indian Affairs says, "if he wanted the same benefits as a white vet, he should move off reserve and give up his status" (81). While moving off reserve and giving up his status would also be a sacrifice of Xa'isla identity, community, and way of life, more practically, it would result in Ba-ba-oo's family (a wife and four children) being homeless. Lisa's dad explains that his father "worked hard all his life, and now he would say things like, 'Agnes, I'm useless.' She didn't know what to do" (81). It is not difficult to see connections between institutionalized racism like denying a Native veteran his pension and enforcing enfranchisement, feelings of being worthless and helpless, and

domestic violence. Ba-ba-oo's run in with "spatial isolation from employment, mortgage and insurance redlining, and taxation and transportation policies" reflect other examples of how place and race are coproduced, such as in the case of "residential school segregation" and "the location of environmental amenities and toxic hazards" (Tuck 37). In other words, settler colonialism creates conditions of poverty, lack of education and employment, and health crises on reserves, and then blames Indigenous peoples for those conditions while also labelling them as inferior or somehow incapable of taking care of themselves (which is then used to force dependence and helplessness, and the cycle continues).[52] Thus, I read the choices of Robinson's characters as signs of intergenerational trauma indicative of the need for cleansing and healing. In Lisa's case, her struggles play out in choices that either ally her with good medicine and the little cedar spirit, or with the bad medicine that seeks blood. A large part of Lisa's journey is to work through the entanglements[53] of her own grief and trauma, and those of her community.

Oxasuli: Good and Bad Medicine

"…there's good medicine and bad. Best not to deal with it at all if you don't know what you're doing. It's like *oxasuli*. Tricky stuff." (Robinson, *Monkey* 154)

Like G'psgolox, Hayenhwá:tha, and Atotarho, Lisa's encounters with pain and grief – the deaths of Mick, Ma-ma-oo, Pooch, and Tab; her sexual assault; her missing brother; the lack of futurity offered to her people in general, and to her specifically (the only dream she ever voices is to work in the cannery) – leave her feeling vulnerable, helpless, and in need of consoling. However, unlike these figures, Lisa is not offered condolence or ceremony or even communal or

[52] My thinking here is greatly influence by Maria Yellowhorse Braveheart's scholarship, which understands social problems (*e.g.* suicide, homicide, accidental deaths, domestic violence, child abuse, and alcoholism, *etc*.) within Indigenous communities as "the product of a legacy of chronic trauma and unresolved grief across generations" that originated "from the loss of lives, land, and vital aspects of Native culture promulgated by the European conquest of the Americas" (60).

[53] Atotarho means "entangled" (Hale 7).

clan support to help her with the burden of grief. These feelings are exacerbated by her gift of precognition. Though she knows the little man comes before something bad happens, Lisa doesn't have the interpretive tools to act on this knowledge and so feels powerless and guilty for not being able to save her loved ones. This helps to explain Lisa's fluctuating receptiveness towards the little man. In one instance she convinces herself that "the little man [is] a dream brought on by eating dinner too late" (132) and refers to him as a "little bastard," then in the next moment she realizes that he's "trying to comfort her" (132). Admittedly, the incongruence between the little man's jolly antics and the events of trauma that they predict for Lisa could be read as apathy for her suffering or even sadism on the part of the little man; however, given Ma-ma-oo's warning that those in the spirit world "think different from the living" (153), I interpret the little man as trying to comfort and cheer Lisa up. The lack of linear temporality for spirits (who exist in a place outside of time) might explain why the cheer comes before the misfortune and not the other way around as we might expect. The only time that the little man does appear both before and after a tragedy is when Lisa is raped:

> The little man appeared on my dresser like he used to do … He dropped to the floor and stared at me. His eyes were red-brown. His eyebrows were mossy green. His face was different this time, was grey-brown and dry like cedar bark. Ants skittered between the cracks in his skin.
>
> "If you couldn't stop it," I said, "what good are you?" His eyes glittered as he watched me. "Don't bother coming again," I said. He reached out to touch my hair, just for a second, and then he was gone. (259)

Placed within the context of other Xa'isla oral stories of redcedar and its generosity and care for the Xa'isla, I read this last visit of the little man as an act of love. He came to condole her, but

she didn't understand and so instead, let her anger and hurt drive him away (not unlike Atotarho). It isn't until Ma-ma-oo has a stroke that Lisa realizes the benefit of his visits in preparing her for bad news: "Until that moment, I had never appreciated the little man. This is, I thought, what it's like for everybody else. Hello, it's bad news. Bam. I couldn't grasp it; my head wouldn't wrap around it" (283). After she tells the little man to leave her alone, the bad medicine beings try to tempt Lisa: "something came slithering in my direction, a heavy weight being dragged through the undergrowth somewhere close" (260). Following the sounds, she discovers a Dungess crab in a tree (an abnormal place for a crab to be) and then hears voices calling to her: "We can hurt him for you" (261); "Bring us meat, and we'll hurt him" (262). Though she resists directly engaging the bad medicines at that moment, she does internally wish Cheese dead.

Lisa encounters another manifestation of bad medicine when she is taken to a therapist by her parents. She sees a creature with "no flesh, just tight, thin skin over bones" (272) wrapped around the therapist's waist and whispering destructive, twisted thoughts into her ear that feed into the therapist's fears and insecurities. The thing seems satisfied to feed off of the therapist, Ms. Jenkins', negative thoughts, until she undermines the possibility of ghosts being real for Lisa. It then turns its attention on Lisa, and attaches itself to her face:

> Its touch was like a breeze on wet skin. The air changed, became the way air is before a thunderstorm. While the thing was feeding, I kept seeing Mick's body as Dad pulled it into the boat, Mick's empty eye sockets in his lipless face, the fishing net embedded in his skin. Words came out of my mouth, ones the thing knew Ms. Jenkins wanted to hear, but I was drowning. I yanked myself away, and the thing fled back to Ms. Jenkins. My heart trip-hammered. I felt glued to the chair, heavy, lethargic. (274)

Though she knows it's bad, Lisa wants it to feed on her again so she won't be alone. Like Atotarho, she demonstrates how fear, loneliness, and despair can lead someone down a path of hurtful and negative thinking and behaviour. She becomes entangled in her pain and grief seemingly without recourse for straightening her mind. When the Peacemaker puts his hands on Atotarho to straighten the crooks of his body, he assures him that "there shall be Righteousness when [people] desire justice, Health when [people] obey reason, [and] Power when [people] accept the Great Law" (Wallace 61-2). To me, this suggests that part of what led Atotarho to choose violence was a lack of justice, peace, and reason in the world.

Recognizing that such chaos is often inherent within human beings, Robinson reflects such an environment within her novel. When Lisa is harassed by the group of young, white men she is blamed, and when she gives her friendship to another lonely soul she is raped and before she can choose whether or not to come forward with the truth, the narrative of the event has already been coopted by her rapist who portrays her as a slut. When she refuses to accept lies about her people being cannibals, her non-Indigenous teacher accuses her of causing trouble and sends her to the principle's office. When she increasingly gets lost in the complexities of a gift she cannot begin to understand, she is pathologized not only by doctors, but by her family as well. Then her Olympic bound brother, the shining hope of not only her family, not only the Xa'isla community, but of Indigenous peoples everywhere, injures his arm, drops out of swimming, starts drinking and doing drugs, and finally disappears. With him goes a badly needed Indigenous role model and success story to help counter the stereotypes and narratives of tragedy and disappearance espoused (and also realized) by settler society. Each of these personal struggles is also undergirded by systemic settler colonialism and institutionalized racism strategically weaponized to disempower, dislocate, and disappear Indigenous Peoples. Lisa's

confrontation with the white men who intend to abduct her is not an isolated event, a random crime, or a couple of bad apples; rather, it is a symptom of Canadian representations of Indigenous women as inherently violable, a message that is consistently reinforced every time the legal system condones the abduction, sexual assault, and murder of Indigenous women by letting perpetrators go unpunished.[54] Lisa therefore suffers not only from personal loss and grief, but from confrontations with external societal views of her as other and dehumanized. For Lisa, then, there is little justice, peace, and reason in the world. But, like Hayenhwá:tha, who stumbles into the forest lost in grief and finds peace and solace first in the word-thoughts offered by First Woman, and then in the condolence performed by the Peacemaker, Lisa stumbles into the wilderness of the Douglas Channel in search of her brother and of peace. As First Woman offered Hayenhwá:tha guidance on how to cleanse his eyes, ears, and throat, so she guides Lisa into awareness of how storied landscape, spirits, and ancestors can help her, too, pick her mind up off the ground.

(Re)mapping as Nakwelagila

"*This I would do if I found anyone burdened with grief even as I am. I would take these shell strings in my hands and condole with them. The strings would become words and lift away the darkness with which they are covered*" (Wallace 55).

"*Cleansing for our people is referred to as Nakwelagila which teaches the importance for cleansing inside and outside, mentally and physically. The old people have said the 'strength of the medicine involves the power of the mind and that the mind is the backbone of our medicine*'" (Green 71)

[54] Violence against Indigenous women and girls is also condoned when those in power clearly express indifference and disregard about their disappearance and death: "Um it, it isn't really high on our radar, to be honest"
- Prime Minister Stephen Harper on a public inquiry into missing aboriginal women (Kappo 2014)

As discussed earlier, *nakwelagila* is a cleansing ritual intended to reaffirm respectful relationships with Creation and put one's soul in a good way. Fasting and performing this cold water bath increases one's "luck"; it grants the favour of Creator, the earth, and spirits. As the above teaching from the Kitamaat Village elders indicates, there is a direct relationship between performing *nakwelagila* to have a good mind, and being able to use that good mind to empower one's medicine. It is perhaps helpful to recall here that medicine includes not just the physical cure of bodily ailments through the use of plants and foods, for example, but also an ability to interface with unseen forces in order to restore balance and well-being. Similar holistic viewpoints about medicine exist in Rotinonhsonni contexts. As the Six Nations Confederacy website states:

> the Haudenosaunee believed that sicknesses were caused as much by magical causes as natural. To chase away evil spirits causing sicknesses and heal the ill, the Haudenosaunee employed spells, dances, ceremonies, sacred instruments and secret societies. Medicine societies have sacred masks which are used to heal the ill and chase away sickness… Healing is as much a spiritual process as it is a natural [one] and people must believe in the power of the medicine and allow the Creator to heal them. ("Medicine")

For example, both the strings of wampum and words of comfort used in condolence are medicine used to help alleviate the heavy burden of grief. Like the requickening address, which wipes grief away from eyes, ears, and throat so the mourner can once again be of good mind, *nakwelagila* acts as a medicine by restoring body and mind to a place of strength and power. In a sense, it is also like the medicine of redcedar which is "protective and transforms energy" (Morningstar). These concepts, of strength and power, also appear in the history of *Kayanerekowa*. The message of peace Peacemaker shares with the soon to be Rotinonhsonni

Confederacy counsels the people to follow the principles of peace, power, and righteousness in order to be of good mind and walk a path of peace.

In the case of *Monkey Beach*, Lisa and much of her community struggle to walk a path of peace as the inherited grief and trauma of colonization, ongoing infringement and destruction of their lands, and denial of their sovereignty and Aboriginal title repeatedly drops their hearts and minds to the ground. When the power of Lisa's mind is grief-stricken, the medicine becomes twisted. This is evidenced by Lisa's struggle with the bad medicine beings who offer to hurt people for her in exchange for meat. Thus, when Lisa begins her journey down the Douglas Channel in search of her brother, it is also a spiritual healing journey. As she travels through waterways known and navigated by the Xa'isla for centuries, and beside landscapes made familiar to her through both personal and collective memory, Lisa engages in a process of storying the land that I suggest acts as a metaphorical *nakwelagila*.

In *Place in Research*, Eve Tuck positions "storytelling as a practice of shaping and being shaped by place" (34). Stories, she argues, "carry out a labour; creating, maintaining, and/or shifting narratives about the places in which we live and how they produce us and us them" (34). Onödowá'ga:' (Seneca) scholar Mishuana Goeman also emphasizes this interrelationship in her concept of (re)mapping:

> (Re)mapping … is the labour Native authors and the communities they write within and about undertake in the simultaneously metaphoric and material capacities of map making, to generate new possibilities. The framing of 're' within parenthesis connotes the fact that in (re)mapping, Native women employ traditional and new tribal stories as a means of continuation or what Gerald Vizenor aptly calls stories of survivance. (Goeman 3)

Rather than "a utopian recovery of land through mapping pure ideas of indigeneity … on top of colonial maps," Goeman's (re)mapping seeks to "interrogate [the] ever-changing Native epistemologies that frame our understanding of land and our relationships to it and to other peoples" (3). In this light, Goeman continues, "(re)mapping is not just about regaining that which was lost and returning to an original and pure point in history, but instead understanding the processes that have defined our current spatialities in order to sustain vibrant Native futures" (3). Thus, (re)mapping is not about grafting the past onto the present, but "about acknowledging the power of Native epistemologies in defining our moves toward spatial decolonization, a specific form of spatial justice" (4). By narrating *nu'yem* stories of places that she habitually moves through, passes by, and recalls her family and ancestors living upon, Lisa engages in a process of place-making that marks the landscape as Xa'isla *wa'wais*, and both the land and its stories as living within her. In so doing she achieves multiple levels of (re)mapping: she (re)maps the Xa'isla as claimed by the Douglas Channel and its surrounding environment, both ancestrally and in the future; and, seeing herself reflected back in the stories and landscapes she evokes, Lisa (re)maps herself. To return for a moment to Rotinonhsonni history, Lisa's (re)mapping of herself as a reflection of the land echoes Atotarho's turn from cannibalism upon seeing himself reflected in the Peacemaker. In *Art of Peace*, Elizabeth Doxtater offers the following narration:

> Thatataho was cooking a human being. He removed the pot and placed a pot of water on his fire. Thatataho looked into the pot to see if it was hot. Peacemaker climbed on the roof of his home and looked in through the smoke hole. Thatataho looked into his cooking pot and saw Peacemaker's reflection. When he saw the kindness in Peacemaker's face, he immediately began to change. (24)

By telling herself the stories of her people and their history with place, Lisa re-establishes a relationship with those places, their spirits, and the Creator. Like *nakwelagila*, this process helps to cleanse her grief and, in the metaphor of condolence, straighten her mind.

As Lisa travels towards Monkey Beach, she passes between the Kildala Arm and Costi (Coste) Island, then continues past Wee-wah hot springs (Weewanie) and Ga-bas'wa (Hawkesbury Island), through the Verney Passage and down the Ursula Channel to arrive at Awamusdis ("beach of plenty"; Bishop Bay – Monkey Beach Conservancy).[55] Her storying of landscape begins from inside her own home, where she can see Canoe Mountain. Marked at its top with the shape of a canoe, the mountain tells the people when it is time to fish for oolichan:

> when the sun touched the bow, you knew the oolichans would be here. Bears woke up and eagles gathered with seagulls and crows and ravens, waiting anxiously at the rivers. Seals bobbed hopefully in the water and killer whales followed the seals. The people who still made grease started building wooden fermenting boxes and tuning in to the weather network, watching for gales and storm warnings that might delay the start of oolichan fishing. (88-9)

Oolichan – or *jak'un* – mark Haisla presence on their traditional territories in more ways than one. While reading the land in the example of Canoe Mountain demonstrates careful observation of the ebb and flow of their environment over generations, *jak'un* also ties the people to their places through food. Oolichan grease, Lisa tells us, is a staple of traditional Xa'isla diet, but a "delicacy that you have to grow up eating to love" (85). Only the Xa'isla (and other Northwest Coast people who eat *jak'un*) have lived long enough in their places to develop both a biological

[55] I include, in brackets, the Canadian names for locations with slightly different spellings or Xa'isla names in order to facilitate finding these locations on google maps. In doing so it is not my intention to reinforce colonial cartographies, but rather to help the reader unfamiliar with West Coast topography to visualize Lisa's journey, and locate the traditional *wa'wais* territories she travels through.

proclivity for the taste of *jak'un*, and the expertise to know when to fish for them, and how to cook them into grease. Outlining both the practical logistics for preparing the grease, as well as the sociopolitical complexities it signifies, Lisa admits that catching the fish and cooking the oil is complicated, takes specialized knowledge, and a considerable time commitment. Only two of the rivers in Kitamaat territory still carry *jak'un* (the Kitimat River is too polluted from the Alcan smelter), and it takes considerable resources – a good boat, enough gas, a crew of people to help, and several weeks off of work – to make it to either the Kemano or Kitlope rivers and catch enough of the small numbers of spawning *jak'un* left in B.C. (92-3). Kitamaat Village is also connected to *jak'un*. Gladys tells Lisa that a long time ago, before the Gitamaat and Gitlop people amalgamated to form the Xa'isla, the "people were afraid to go up the Douglas Channel because this great big monster guarded the entrance. It was white and opened its huge mouth, making a roaring cry" (114). In "Stewards of the Land," Jonah Howard, Russell Ross, Sr., Gordon Robinson, Chris Walker and Samson Ross relate the same story in their account of the Xa'isla migration to Kitamaat:

> The broad flats at the mouth of the river looked like the head of a great monster with an immense mouth that opened and closed like it was ready to swallow anything that came along, canoes and all. Wamis turned his canoe around and headed back to Mud Bay. But he was both curious and brave. So, the next morning he came back with all the men in his group, loaded with their weapons. The monster's mouth across the bottom of the Kitimat River valley was still opening and closing. They paddled stealthily in the shelter of the shore and headed north past Wohlstu (WOH-th-sdoo) and C'imoc'a (tsee-MOH-tsuh), the future site of Kitamaat Village) and past Zakwalisla (dzahkwah-LEES-luh, now the site of MK Bay). Finally, they got close enough to see the monster clearly and realized

> that what looked like a monster chewing was simply that at low tide the beaches were thick with seagulls, feasting on oolichans and they often rose in a cloud, circled briefly and re-alighted; the cloud of birds looking from a distance like a white monster mouth opening and closing. Relieved, they entered the river mouth. The river was so full of oolichans that they caught enough in a small seine to literally fill the canoe. And then they headed back towards camp. (Powell, *Stewards* 12-13)

Jak'un therefore signify Xa'isla presence in Kitamaat territory for generations. They figure prominently in their migration story, and even mark their taste buds with genealogy. Therefore, when Lisa sees Canoe Mountain and Kitamaat Village, she is reminded of the longevity of her people and their intimate relationship with their environment.

Moving farther South, Lisa continues to mark each place, and each *wa'wais* through story. As she passes Costi island and the Kildala arm, she remembers hiking in the area with Ma-ma-oo who showed her "where the winter and summer camps used to be, where people picked berries or had traplines" (192). Berry and plant picking also figure prominently in the text as a form of cultural (re)mapping that documents Xa'isla *nu'yem* sustainability practices, familiarity with the seasonal calendar, and proper protocols for when and how specific plants, medicines, and forest materials can be gathered. Thus, the detailed information Robinson offers in each of Lisa's ventures with either Mick or Ma-ma-oo to pick *q°alh'm* [salmonberries], *du'qua* [stinging nettle], *oxasuli*, *Pipxs'm* [berries with mould on them], *mimayus* [pain in the ass berries], *ci'x°a* [crabapples], *kolu'n* [sapling cottonwood], and *uh's* [soapberries], affirms Xa'isla presence – both ancestral and ongoing – on their traditional *wa'wais* territories (often identified in formal documentation by the resources such as berries and medicines available in their bounds).

Going South down Verney Passage and around Ga-bas'wa, or Hawkesbury Island, Gardner Canal passes on her left. Following the Canal would take Lisa to Kemano, and her father's inherited *wa'wais* area. Mick gives her this information on a past fishing trip: "'We're near Kemano,' Mick said. 'Look up there. That's your ba-ba-oo's trapline on that mountain. I think Al has it now'" (99). On the same trip to Kitlope Lake, Lisa's mom, Gladys, identifies Misk'usa (the home of the G'psgolox pole) for her: "'Over there,' Mom said, pointing to the left bank, 'somewhere up in that part of the forest, there's a village that was buried under a landslide about five hundred years ago'" (112). Within the Kitlope watershed is also located Qalhamut, on the south lakeshore below T'ismista (the stone man), which Gladys also points out to Lisa:

> Mom pointed out some indentations in the rock on the beach that she said were the footsteps of the Stone Man. They were in granite. They looked like real footsteps…When I was little, she told me that the Stone Man was once a young hunter with a big attitude. He thought he knew everything, so when the elders warned him not to go up the mountain one day, he laughed at them and went up anyways. Near the top, he sat down to rest and wait for his dogs. A cloud came down and turned him to stone. Sometimes, when the wind blows right, she said, you can hear him whistling for his dogs. (113-14)

Lisa passes through Blind Pass, "a favourite spot for spring salmon to rest and mill around," where she recalls Ma-ma-oo wintered when she was a little girl (215). At Blind Point, one and a half kilometres north of Monkey Beach, Lisa thinks about how "the tides are strong, and mix everything up, so the five families that used to winter here could fish just in the bay and get both halibut and cod" (269). Approaching Gee Quans (also Ziqwans), Lisa recalls how "Lazy, shape-changing *Weegit*, the raven, was tired of paddling around the mountain on his way to Kitamaat and in a fit of energy, he tried to push the mountain down to create a shortcut. Halfway through,

he took a break and never finished the job. Na-ka-too [also, Neqetu] is on the opposite side of the channel. The two Xa'isla families who lived there used to play a game, *na-ka-too*, in which they would challenge each other to see who could bend a sapling the farthest" (276). Finally, Lisa approaches Monkey Beach, a place "full of power" that "you can feel … like a warmth, a tingle" (316). Here is where she dreamed of Jimmy after he'd gone missing. Here is where her family often came to dig for cockles, catch clams, and search for *b'gwus*. In an action that recalls her mother and Mick's former instruction to "be polite and introduce yourself to the water" (112) like they did in the old days to "cleans[e] your soul" (118) and "see … with fresh eyes" (112), Lisa dips her hands in the water (294): she performs *nakwelagila*.

By storying landscape and enlivening herself through memories of place, Lisa performs a metaphoric *nakwelagila* on herself, a cleansing signified by her actual introduction to the waters at Monkey Beach (this takes on even more significance when we recall that earlier when her mother and Mick try to get her to perform *nakwelagila* she "didn't see the point and said so" (112)). Returning once more to the Rotinonhsonni history of Hayenhwá:tha and the Peacemaker, I am better able to understand why, despite cleansing, Lisa turns to bad medicines to discover what happened to Jimmy. After the death of his daughters, when Hayenhwá:tha stumbles into the forest in grief and begins to condole himself with wampum, he can only go so far on his own. It isn't until the Peacemaker takes up the strings and words of condolence and repeats back to Hayenhwá:tha that he is able to return to the path of the good mind and peace. When she arrives at Monkey Beach, Lisa is still searching for her brother, still searching for someone to reflect back to her the love, comfort, and kindness that Peacemaker reflects back to Hayenhwá:tha. Thus, she engages the bad medicines in the hopes that they will help her find Jimmy. It is telling that when she realizes they've betrayed her and mean her serious harm, Lisa crawls into the

ocean even though she can barely swim. Here, I suggest, is the ultimate moment of cleansing in the novel. Fully submerged in freezing water, Lisa slips into the land of the dead where Ma-ma-oo, Mick, Ba-ba-oo and Jimmy all reflect back to her that she is loved and cared for, and that they will be together again. Just as Peacemaker and Hayenhwá:tha are finally able to get Atotarho to hear their message of peace by singing the Hai! Hai! chant, so the spirits of Lisa's family sing to straighten her mind and return her to the land of the living. "Aux'gwala, the others are singing. Take care of her yourself, wherever you're going" (374). This echoes Ma-ma-oo's song that she shared with Lisa to help her get over the loss of Mick:

> Food is dust in my mouth without you.
> I see you in my dreams and all I want to do is sleep.
> If my house was filled with gold, it would still be empty.
> If I was king of the world, I'd still be alone.
> If breath was all that was between us, I would
> stop breathing to be with you again.
> The memory of you is my shadow and all my
> days are dark, but I hold on to these memories
> until I can be with you again.
> Only your laughter will make them light; only
> your smile will make them shine.
> We are apart so that I will know the joy of being
> with you again.
> Take care of yourself, wherever you are.
> Take care of yourself, wherever you are. (174)

These are the last words Lisa hears before re-awakening on Monkey Beach; she is sent back to the world of the living both metaphorically and literally. Lisa performs *nakwelagila* on two levels: the first she does for herself through telling stories that emplace her, this combs the snakes from her hair; the second *nakwelagila* takes her to the spirit world where she learns that her gift is like *oxasuli*, dangerous and potentially deadly if you don't know what you are doing. Like Hayenhwá:tha who can only condole himself halfway, Lisa doesn't find her way back to the good mind until both the land and her ancestors speak (or sing) condoling words back to her, reaffirming for her a connection to Creation, the earth, and spirits. Lisa's umbilical was already in the ground, Creation just needed to be reintroduced to her.[56] Each story connects her not only to ancestors and historical presence on land, but to a futurity that refuses the erasure of Xa'isla people. This process is mirrored in her own journey to the land of the dead, where the hopelessness instilled by structures of settler colonialism literally turns her into a ghost. She comes back with the snakes untangled from her hair. That she comes back from the land of the living not only signifies a personal rebirth, a return to life, a new emergence, but also signifies that the same such renewal is possible for her people. She is now empowered with an understanding of her gift that will allow her to "build canoes." She can now do the work of the good mind like Hayenhwá:tha, she can help lead her people in spiritual and cultural resurgence.

[56] Thanks to Vanessa Watts-Powless for helping me think through Lisa as (re)mapping herself relationally, and thus being re-introduced through *nakwelagila* and condolence to Creation.

Chapter Three

Thomas King's *Truth & Bright Water* and Sugar Maple

PART 1 ~ *Wahta* and Ecological Holism

"At some time in the future, you will see the chief of the trees, the Great Maple, begin dying from the top down. At that time it will be a warning to all that serious times are upon us, and to take heed to our conduct." (Skaniatariio)

Bundled in our warmest layers, my fellow Kanien'keha learners and I trundle after our teacher, Tehotakerá:tonh, as he leads us into the bush. Arms brimming with buckets, taps, and a drill we approach the first line of trees and I mumble a hello to them from beneath the thick wrapping of my scarf. Speaking in what I've come to recognize as the lilting rhythm of my people, Tehotakerá:tonh describes everything we can see around us. I understand only a fraction of what he says, but I still soak up the sounds like sunlight. Whenever I hear the word, *wahta*, I perk up as I know he's talking about maple. My toes are already half frozen as I walk beneath the leaf-bare canopy of many different tree folks, looking for sugar maple. Someone asks in the language how we are supposed to recognize *wahta* without its leaves, and Tehota'kerá:tonh tells us to look at the bark of the trees. *Wahta's* trunk is grey with long fissures creating vertical, irregular sections of bark that curl at the edges. Approaching a tree of this description, Tehota'kerá:tonh points to the roots, indicating with his fingers that we are to find the space between two main roots, then he gestures upwards towards the tree's crown and holding his hand with palm facing outward, fingers splayed, shows us to look for branches growing horizontally

above one another. Speaking in the language all the while, he traces a vertical line downward from the aligned branches to the space between two main roots, then places his hand halfway up the trunk in a spot on that imaginary vertical line. Rubbing his hands together and blowing on them slightly as if he were trying to warm them up, he places one back on the trunk. Slowly, I begin to realize that we are looking for warmth. My reasoning turns out to be right, as I'm invited up with the rest of the class to feel the warm spot Tehota'kerá:tonh has found on *wahta's* trunk. It feels like hovering your hand over someone's mouth as they breathe out their body heat. It also reminds me of the heat that radiates from sunburnt skin even days after exposure. In this specific spot, my classmate Katsitsionhawi begins to drill, then she sticks in a spout, and hangs a metal bucket to collect the sugar water that has already begun to drip. Later, when we can speak English again, Tehota'kerá:tonh explains that the combination of cold nights and warm days begins the sap flowing usually in mid-February to mid-March. The rising temperature creates pressure in the tree, and thus the warm spot on the trunk indicates a vein of *wahta ohses* (maple water) flowing up from the roots.

Moving from tree to tree, we collect sap from buckets hung earlier in the season and pour it into a communal pot. Taking turns, we dip cups and water bottles we've brought with us into the vat of sugar water and take long, cold drinks. The taste of *wahta ohses* – which I've never had the pleasure of until now – is mild with a tinge of sweetness. More than anything, to me, it tastes clean in a way that tap water never has. The other students tell me that *wahta* sap is medicine that Shonkwaia'tishon sent to the *onkwehonwe* to renew their strength and replenish their bodies after long winters of undernourishment and grey days. This is why *wahta* is the leader of the trees, according to Kanien'keha:ka scholar, Dan Longboat:

> The leader of all the Trees is Maple, it provides us with the first medicine food of the Spring which helps renew our strength and reminds us of our continual responsibility… to give thanks to the Creator and to all the many Bushes and Trees. At the time when the air changes and the Spring warmth comes again to bring renewed life to our Mother Earth, the Maple's sap begins to flow and to come help strengthen our People. (Longboat 103)

In addition to providing the first medicine of the season, *wahta* is also first to bloom and grow leaves in the spring, signalling to the other trees that it is time for them, too, to participate in the cyclical renewal of life. Usually near the end of February, "after the first thunder which wakes up the trees" ("Maple Sap Ceremony"), *kanonhses* holds ceremonies for "opening" or "putting sap in the trees." The account A.C. Parker gives of the "Maple Festival" in *The Code of Handsome Lake* says that the date of the ceremony is decided by the weather, and its "object is to thank all trees for their services to man and invoke their protection and good will for the coming year" (101). In Parker's description of the proceedings, a tobacco burning is done to honour and give thanks to *wahta* and ask for protection. The words of the tobacco burning – which directly address *wahta* and the Creator – first ask that the maple water continues to flow, then that no harm comes to anyone harvesting the sap, and finally, they give thanks to Shonkwaia'tishon. Once the sap begins to dry up in the trees, a day is chosen to give thanks for the *wahta ohses* harvest, and to "close the trees." In both the opening and closing ceremonies, the people communicate directly to the trees by burning tobacco in their honour. Speaking and offering tobacco directly to the tree nation and *wahta* specifically is an acknowledgment of the trees as beings with selfhood and the ability to directly interface with human experience and behaviour.[57]

[57] Thanks to Rick Monture who helped me come to an understanding of the opening of the trees ceremony as an act of direct communication with trees.

We do not take for granted that *wahta ohses* will always be there when we want it. I have heard it said that without the proper respect and gratitude – both of which tend to foster self-regulation and conservation practices – *wahta* (and any of the other beings in nature upon which we depend) may choose to withhold her gifts. By offering respect and gratitude for the gifts trees share, and the example they set for living in a good way and following the original instructions of Shonkwaia'tishon, the *onkwehonwe* follow their own original instructions to give thanks and maintain good relationships with the tree nation. The opening and closing of the trees at *kanonhses* exemplifies how ceremony teaches attendance to inner senses. Though I have only been attending *kanonhses* for two years, what seems essential to participating fully is an understanding and an acceptance that it is our responsibility, and our privilege really, to nurture nation-to-nation relationships with nonhuman and spiritual beings. These experiences strongly influence my perception of the world and of the kinds of relationships that seem possible. When I walk amongst trees I feel greeted by family, I do not feel strange asking for their help, and I am perfectly convinced that they've given it when my heart feels lighter, or I make it safely through the forest during a windstorm, or I drink a tea using their leaves and feel better afterward. Equally, I delight at each opportunity to return the caring that trees give me. Removing garbage from their branches, telling them they're loved, offering them tobacco, disentangling fallen limbs, and brushing off the bending weight of snow are all opportunities to give back a little of what trees share with me. In a sense, access to Rotinonhsonni teachings and knowledge through stories, oral histories, and ceremony grow in me an awareness of unseen forces, or, if you like, the quantum plenum and implicate order, the energy of the universe which makes up all life. This awareness is essential for my work with trees, and my attempts at communicating with them.

Cultural protocols of giving thanks to *wahta*, of harvesting only what we need, and of leaving enough for others (including squirrels, birds, insects, and other animals) also epitomize the principles of *Sewatokwa'tshera't* (Dish with One Spoon). *Sewatokwa'tshera't* is a view of Mother Earth as a bowl holding the sustenance that all her children are to share equally. The Dish represents the forests and meadows that provide us with food, wood, medicines, and other natural materials that help sustain our way of life. *Sewatokwa'tshera't* territory represents what is now southern Ontario (from the Great Lakes to Quebec and from Lake Simcoe into the US). Rick Hill suggests that the abundance of game, foods, and other resources in this ecological zone – also referred to as the beaver hunting grounds, the common pot, and the Ohio Valley – became the basis for establishing "the first treaty made in North America… between all the Native nations before the Europeans arrived" (qtd. in Nahwegahbow). The Dish With One Spoon Wampum articulates an agreement among the nations of the Rotinonhsonni (later this was expanded to include the Anishinaabe, Mississaugas, and European settlers) that everyone has rights to hunt, fish, and trap game that roams the shared beaver hunting grounds. People are not to fight over the game, but willingly share what is available. This tenet of nonviolence is symbolized by the wooden spoon from which everyone can feed themselves without the risk of getting cut or accidentally cutting someone else.

Sewatokwa'tshera't is not only a treaty between humans, but also a treaty that people have with nature. As Rick Hill puts it: "Nature says, 'Here's the great dish and inside the dish are all the plants, the animals, the birds, the fish, the bushes, the trees, everything you need to be healthy and therefore, happy'" (qtd. in Nahwegahbow). Y*ethinisten:ha onhwéntsia* upholds her end of the bargain by continually renewing the resources upon which humans and all life depends. As for us humans who benefit from and rely upon *Sewatokwa'tshera't*, it is our

responsibility to take only what we need, to "always leave something in the dish for everybody else, including the dish," and to keep the dish clean. These rules directed "the treaty between us and nature, and … the treaty between us and everybody else," explains Hill (qtd. in Nahwegahbow).

As Hill describes above, there are many nonhuman nations living in the Dish that share their gifts with humans for our benefit. Not least of these, is *wahta*. According to the online US National Plant Germplasm System, *wahta's* natural range extends from the east coast of Canada through Quebec and southern Ontario, to southeastern Manitoba, and the northern parts of the eastern US. This means that *Sewatokwa'tshera't* sits deep within *wahta* territory.[58] In looking at the juxtaposed territories of *wahta* and *Sewatokwa'tshera't*, it's important to note that they both map over the imagined nation-state border between Canada and the US. In other words, the Dish with One Spoon agreement, based upon interdependence and sharing an ecology, predates the formation of (and will likely survive) both settler countries and their imposed borders.

Many of the first settlers to *Sewatokwa'tshera't* depended upon Indigenous peoples to teach them how to survive here. One of the things we taught them was how to collect *wahta ohses* (Huron 11). It's ironic then, that Canada – a nation with a record of stealing Indigenous lands, breaking treaties, spending monies held in trust for Indigenous peoples, refusing to acknowledge Indigenous sovereignties and traditional governments, and violating Indigenous peoples' human rights – chose the maple leaf as a symbol of its national identity. Without the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island there would be no Canada. The maple leaf that graces the Canadian flag does not represent Indigenous-Canadian, nation-to-nation relationships; rather, it is a symbol that aids in the national forgetting of the genocidal violence that was, and continues

[58] See Appendix D for maps of *Sewatokwa'tshera't* and *wahta* territories.

to be, waged against Indigenous peoples. The flag of Canada plays its part in upholding fictional narratives of terra nullius and the tenets of the doctrine of discovery to reinforce the settler colonial imperative to remove, disappear, and extinguish indigenous inhabitants of these lands. This is a worldview far removed from the principles of *Sewatokwa'tshera't*, which would have us recognize the maple leaf as a symbol of our interdependence with the ecology of the Dish, and with each other. These differing perspectives – between border-defined nationalism based upon false narratives of utopic genesis and the exclusion of the Indigenous other, on the one hand, and shared ecological kinship, interdependence, and communal caretaking, on the other – come face-to-face in Thomas King's novel, *Truth and Bright Water*. As such, this chapter explores themes common both to King's text and to readings of *wahta*. Aesthetic and historical readings of *wahta* convey teachings about the importance of balance (cultural, spiritual, political, and ecological), a theme that offers important insight into the characters of King's text who live precariously suspended between settler and Indigenous borders (as well as between the US and Canadian borders). Read together, both *wahta* and *Truth & Bright Water* would have us consider how developing perspectives of ecological holism (*i.e.* the interconnection of all life) alongside our mentalities of borders and boundaries might change our sense of responsibility and methods of relating to one another.

Reading Wahta

As I hike along Spring Valley trail in *Anonwarore'tsherakayón:ne* (Dundas Valley), *wahta's* distinctive five-lobed leaves wave at me from every direction. I approach *wahta* in the same way I approached *yotsistyonte o:se* and *onen'takwenhtensera*. I begin by speaking the *Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen,* greeting each being in Creation with love, respect, and gratitude. When I feel an intuition to stop and visit with a particular tree, I do so. Receiving such a

message, I carefully step off the trail, so as not to crush any seedlings, fold my body, and rest my back against what I can only guess is a middle-aged maple. On branches with the most exposure to sunlight, I spot small, reddish green trumpets; new, unfurling leaves. With a pinch of tobacco for good company and having arranged myself for decent back support, I introduce myself, and offer some words of thanks. Resting there, I think back to my time in the sugar bush and the water *wahta* shared with me to purify my body and mind. Perhaps having ingested part of *wahta's* medicine will make it easier to hear her thoughts. Trying to relax, I focus on my breathing. For each of my exhalations I imagine *wahta's* inhalation, and her exhalations as my inhalations. I visualize this exchange of breath, counting them in my mind until I am lulled into a state of quietude (admittedly, this practice has, on occasion, actually led me to fall asleep in the forest. While I welcome such an opportunity for the possible dream knowledge I might access, more often than not I simply wake up covered in bugs, dirt, and leaves without any additional insight). With *yotsìtsyonte o:se* and *onen'takwenhtensera*, being in this mindful space allowed place-thought to percolate. This is how, for example, I came to understand *onen'takwenhtensera's* message about cleansing grief, by being open and receptive to thoughts and feelings as possible communication. Sitting on a bed of dry, crackling leaves shed in falls past, I wait, and wait, and wait. After two hours, I get up to go. My disappointment at what feels like failed communication is only slightly eased by reminding myself that these relationships take time. I return the next day, and a week after that, but come away disappointed again, and now, slightly anxious. Several times on different occasions, with different trees and in different conditions I try to engage in *wahta*-communication and come away without any clear message.

Ambling northwest along Spencer Creek Trail, I squat down to observe a grouping of *wahta* seedlings. Perhaps a half-foot off the ground, the seedlings each have four leaves

positioned in opposite pairs like intersecting lines. I am trying to follow Tehahenteh's advice in learning to hear *wahta*-thoughts by attending to seeds and the amount of energy they expend in becoming trees. It takes a tremendous amount of dedication, perseverance and work to become a tree. Remembering that trees are first fruit, then seeds, then seedlings, and then finally saplings before they become adults is important for developing an understanding of trees. For *wahta*, the journey begins with a maple key, the medium for the tree's seeds. If the helicopter key sticks a lucky landing and finds a good piece of soil with the right amount of sunlight the casing will eventually dissolve, leaving the seed to germinate within the year. Tehahenteh also tells me that seeds are wise in ways that I never imagined, because they bide their time and wait for the perfect conditions before they germinate and begin their journey of becoming.[59] So I observe seedlings (germinated from keys that presumably fell last spring), and saplings (those taller, thicker, more established tree youths), and finally adult trees (the eldest *wahta* I meet is so tall and so big around that she must be at least a century old. I approach her thinking that she might be more likely to share her wisdom with me, but in fact, all I get for my troubles is a wood tick buried in my neck).

Attempting to take my observations of *wahta* to a deeper level, I begin to try to memorize the appearance, texture, and colour of her leaves and to recall these details in my mind later on when she is not in front of me. In his article, "Phenomenon Illuminates Phenomenon: White Oak and Sugar Maple," Craig Holdrege identifies this technique in Goethean terms as "exact sensorial imagination" (15). According to Holdrege, by closely observing *wahta* and then

[59] This later became significant to me in another context when I was struggling with knowing how to write meta-textually. Dr. Nadine Attewell asked me, "If trees are texts, are texts trees, and how does this change how we might read what's 'inside' them?" Eventually this led me to a realization that while trees tell stories, stories (texts) are also in some respects like trees. Just as seeds wait to germinate until favourable conditions, stories are seeds we carry inside of us that germinate into knowledge when we engage in real world situations that speak to such knowledge.

forming a vivid picture of her leaves in my mind's eye, I "craft the image through inner movement so as to participate in the color, form, texture, and other qualities" of the leaf, thereby allowing me to "inwardly feel" the tree (15). His suggestion is that by engaging in this practice I "connect strongly with [my] perceptions and they become dynamic," bringing *wahta* "to greater life within me" so that I don't feel so separate from her, so that she is no longer so distant from me (15). This imaginative process in turn encourages a closer, more attentive observing of *wahta*. Holdrege explains how this process changed his own observations of Sugar Maple: "I begin to perceive forms, structures, and colors during observation more vibrantly. I can sometimes immediately participate in them and they begin to speak" (15). In an effort to hear *wahta* speak, I repeatedly try to visualize in my mind a complete picture of her leaves, bark, and roots, and when pieces are missing from the image I return to the real thing to help fill in the blanks of my memory. Holdrege's description of sensorial imagination is also helpful in building a vocabulary for my efforts to develop an awareness of the implicate order and communicate with trees. He advises that "we need to carry our experience as an illuminating gaze, as an enriched inwardness that allows us to see more in the world" (18) so that we can "become so sensitive, receptive, and alive that the living qualities of nature speak to us" (17). Like Meyers' cultural empiricism, Holdrege's sensorial imagination emphasizes the ability to expand our five senses to include perception of nonhuman communication.

The east section of the Monarch Trail in *Anonwarore'tsherakayón:ne* (separated from the west section by Old Ancaster Road) drops deeply from Little John Road, where I enter the forest, to meet Ancaster Creek. Rather than following the trail to the west, I turn left, veer off trail, and follow the Creek east. Popping off my runners and socks, I wade into the coldwater Creek. My toes, feet, and ankles sink into silt as I slog my way across. On the opposite bank, I have to fight

to release my feet from the suction of the mud before brushing them off and putting my shoes back on. Before me is a steep climb. I awkwardly claw upwards on all fours, my breath laboured, until one last hand up from a nearby root lands me on even ground. Technically, I am now in the McMaster Conservation Corridor.[60] Around me stand sugar maple and hemlock giants. Spotting the elder *wahta* I've come to visit, I head over and give her a hug. Eyeing her up, I think it would take four people holding hands to encircle this tree. That, and the deep ridges and thick, layered ridges of her bark tell me she is long-lived. I nestle myself in the crook of two roots and watch. The forest floor here is surprisingly bare, but there are a few seedlings who've beat the odds and seem to be doing well. I'm struck once more by the symmetry of the seedling's leaves, each growing in paired opposites. Maple trees are some of the few on Turtle Island that grow symmetrically. This is what often gives their crowns a domed, conical shape. Side branches of *wahta* are paired in opposites off main branches. This symmetry is also seen in the maple key's two wings and their tendency to grow in pairs. When a new seedling shoot pushes through the earth, it grows two leaves from the centre outward. Then those two leaves spread outward, creating room for the next two leaves that also grow from the centre shoot outward, but this time in the opposite direction. This second pair then spreads out to make room for the third pair, and the third pair make room for the fourth. Each time a new pair of leaves grows, they do so in opposite directions. It seems this happens until there are a total of six, or sometimes eight leaves growing from each shoot. Such careful architecture speaks to me. I see a purposeful balance represented in *wahta's* leaves that resonates with some of Rotinonhsonni oral tradition.

[60] Here is another moment in this project where the university space and its community members intersect with Indigenous spheres of coming to know, and my personal search for tree knowledge. I've come to think of these intersections as part of a Two Row relationship between the university and Indigenous communities.

Paired opposites frequently appear in Indigenous oral histories, and often express the importance of balance. Take, for example, the left- and right-handed twins from the Rotinonhsonni creation history, Flint and Sapling. While this historic relationship is sometimes interpreted as a contest of wills between good and evil, I believe a more productive interpretation – one more consistent with what I've come to know of Rotinonhsonni principles – reads the twins as a teaching about the importance of balance (*e.g.* between day and night, winter and summer, life and death, *etc.*). Applied to the context of everyday living, the twins represent the healthy and unhealthy choices we can make in life. Rick Hill talks about the twins as "two different sides of the same character" ("Cultural Intent"), both living within each of us, influencing our thinking, and our behaviour. The importance of balancing between two different, concurrent ways of being is also expressed by the Two Row. *Wahta's* leaves grow across from one another in paired opposites just as the two purple rows of beads mirroring each other on the wampum belt represent a necessary balance between two different human nations.

Wahta's radial growth pattern – in which one leaf points in each direction, north, east, south, and west – bears a striking resemblance to the cardinal directions of a medicine wheel.[61] The Medicine Wheel also emphasizes a relationship between personal and universal balance: "The four directions of the Medicine Wheel remind us of many things, such as the need for balance in the world, and the balance we must strive for everyday within ourselves" (Pitawanakwat). Representing the four directions, four winds and four races, the Medicine Wheel reminds us of the need for balance not only within ourselves (between our left- and right-handed twin thinking for example), but for all of Creation. Read symbolically then, *wahta* seems to represent the need for a balance that extends to the four corners of the earth. *Skaniatariio*, the

[61] As in the cover of King's text.

Onödowá'ga:' prophet, expressed a similar message in his teachings about human influence on the environment.

Skaniatariio warned that there will come a time when *wahta* will start dying from the top down and that this will be a sign to the human nations that their actions have done irreparable harm to the environment. When I think of this warning, I recall also that according to Rotinonhsonni belief we are to think seven generations ahead and consider those future generations before we make any decisions that might impact their future. However, the choices humans have made in their treatment of the planet now means that in seven generations there may not be clean water to drink, clean air to breathe, or food to eat. What *Skaniatariio* warned about centuries ago is now a pressing global issue. We all depend on the earth for our survival and any imbalance in any part of the biosphere affects it in its entirety. I read *wahta's* most important message, therefore, as an affirmation of shared belonging to the earth. We all (humans, animals, rocks, waters, trees, *etc.*) have a sacred alliance with the earth, and the actions of each and every one of us affects the whole. This is an articulation of *teyonkwatonhwentsyo:ni* (the earth, ourselves) as *tsi niyonkwarih:ten* (our kind of matter): the earth as our shared matter and need.

Considering *wahta's* message about balance, and the global nature of our shared need for her continued balance (currently under threat by human-instigated climate change), I suggest returning to Kanien'keha:ka concepts of the earth as our shared mother-matter, discussed in this dissertation's introduction. As mentioned earlier, the reflexive Kanien'keha:ka verb "to need," *tewakatonhwentsyó:ni*, translates literally to "I need the earth, it is my need." To then juxtapose *tsi niyonkwarih:ten*, this is our kind of (global) matter, with *teyonkwatonhwentsyo:ni*, we need (the earth, ourselves), suggests that the earth as our need is our shared matter. Based on

Skaniatariio's prophecy about *wahta* (used to open this chapter), I believe that *wahta* sends the same message: the earth is our shared need and our shared matter.

Though I have yet to experience clear tree-thought in *wahta's* presence, the teachings she offers me through reflection and observation, and the learning that is possible through Rotinonhsonni cultural teachings about *wahta*, both offer important avenues for coming to know. The land-centrism that *wahta* champions about balance and environmental interdependence thus lead my reading of Thomas King's novel, *Truth and Bright Water*. I suggest that King's text – which deals with issues of identity conflict, border crossings, and the simultaneous burden of historic and ongoing colonialism – portrays a mirroring of land and Indigenous peoples in which violation of land, and disruption to Indigenous peoples' landed relationships, cause a devastating loss of equilibrium both in the land and in the people.

* * * *

PART 2 ~

Returning to the *Kaswéntah* River: Sharing Kinship with the Land in Thomas King's *Truth and Bright Water*

Set within the prairie landscape of a fictional Siksikaitsitapi reserve called Bright Water, and a rural Montana town named Truth, King's text unfolds from the perspective of Tecumseh (a reference to the Shawnee leader) who is definingly marked by relational, cultural, and geographic divisions. Tecumseh's parents are divorced and his absentee father, Elvin, prioritizes money over all things. Elvin commercializes the sacred and demonstrates his willingness to violate covenants with nature, ancestors, and living community members, including his son, in order to make a quick buck. While Tecumseh's maternal family (especially his grandmother) value and enact Siksikaitsitapi worldviews of interrelation, they also blend elements of western

material culture into their lives (most notably, pop culture), and Lum's mother dreams of leaving Truth for a life in the "big city." Lum – Tecumseh's cousin, best friend, and co-star of the novel – is physically abused by his father and ends up homeless and living on the prairies. Both boys struggle to find a safe place where they feel they belong, and to know how to reconcile the two different realities (western and Indigenous) that confront them daily in often contradictory and confusing ways. Difficulty in reconciling their Siksikaitsitapi identities within settler capitalist contexts is exacerbated by colonial disruptions to Indigenous landed relationships. Settler colonialism's imposition of Christianity, extermination of the buffalo, banning of Siksikaitsitapi ceremonies and languages, and theft of their artifacts, make it increasingly challenging for new generations of Siksikaitsitapi to know what their ancestors knew, and to find their place in the world. Such divisions between western and Siksikaitsitapi peoples and realities are emphasized by the geography of both towns which are separated by the Shield river (which also marks the national border), and ineffectually connected by an iron bucket suspended on a steel cable, and a derelict, incomplete bridge. While neither Tecumseh or Lum pay particular attention to the Canadian-American border – thereby emphasizing its unnaturalness and artificiality – it still has real effects in their world. Lum's death on the abandoned bridge is the most obvious evidence of the real effects of such divisions. Seeing the high cost of Tecumseh and Lum's experiences of exile from both Indigenous and western worlds (they do not fully belong in either space), the elder brother figure,[62] Monroe Swimmer, seeks to restore Siksikaitsitapi worldviews of ecological interrelation to the peoples of both Truth and Bright Water. It is my suggestion then, that reading *Truth and Bright Water* through *wahta's* teachings about the earth as our shared mother-matter demonstrates how a perspective of internalized ecological holism can restore a

[62] I follow the example of Neal McLeod and Leanne Simpson in using the expression Elder Brother to refer to what is more commonly known as a trickster.

sense of equilibrium and fluidity to those *onkwehonwe* who settler colonialism intentionally unbalances.

Thomas King's novel *Truth and Bright Water* begins with a description of the Shield river as it runs down out of the mountains and into the prairies, where it divides the American town Truth from the Bright Water reserve in Canada. A bird's-eye view of the landscape would show Truth on one side of the river and Bright Water on the other as separate and yet connected by shared waters. This juxtaposition of Indigenous and settler spaces becomes charged with meaning when we learn that the river itself has been designated by the nation-state as a national border. Spanning this divide is a bridge that was abandoned mid-construction and left as a "tangle of rebar and wire" (*Truth* 3) with warped boards, rusted iron and large gaping holes. King explains the bridge in an interview, saying that "as these relationships between people in general and between races and between countries deteriorate . . . this bridge symbolizes that. It won't hold the weight of people trying to cross back and forth" ("Border" 173).

While the bridge and the river are fairly obvious symbols of division, difference, and failed connection, I also suggest that they speak to the possibility of unification based upon a shared ecology. In their holistic vision of the land as a shared need and shared matter for all people, both *wahta* and *Truth and Bright Water* emphasize the need for accord and harmony *across and between* personal, social, and *ecological* borders, in order to renew relationships with the earth. Though the river marks separateness, its fluidity also speaks to the interconnection of all life and to our shared interdependence with the earth. Conceiving of the river as both a space of difference and unity is a helpful metaphor for coming to an understanding of how difference and division — between individuals, races, and nations — can still support an inclusive citizenship: how the metaphorical bridge can become safe and crossable. Each of us has multiple

allegiances, belongings, and responsibilities as citizens of the earth that cross national, political, and cultural borders. Engendering a felt citizenship with the earth could allow for more fluid movement between these zones of belonging. The side-by-side positioning of Indigenous and settler spaces in King's text offers a perfect opportunity for exploring how our shared belonging to Mother Earth puts us into a globally shared citizenship while also allowing us our local, distinct cultures, and nationalities.

I believe this articulation of a parallel, distinct, and yet unified relationship between nations and cultures also invites a reading of King's text through my own nation's concept of the *Aterihwahnira:tshera ne Kaswéntah*[63], the Two Row Wampum of the Rotinonhsonni. Because of my own Kanien'keha:ka background, and having studied the Two Row with Skarure historian Rick Hill at the Deyohaha:ge: Indigenous Knowledge, I immediately saw the Two Row mirrored in the geography of King's novel.[64] While King is not Rotinonhsonni and so is not intentionally following the Two Row, I believe the *Aterihwahnira:tshera ne Kaswéntah* is a way of posing questions central to his text about how differentiation and division can share the same ecology. I therefore employ a localized version of Chadwick Allen's trans-Indigenous methodology in my reading of *Truth and Bright Water* by juxtaposing Rotinonhsonni, Siksikaitsitapi, Anishinabe, and Nêhiyawak knowledges in my analysis of a text produced by a Tsalagi storyteller. In my trans-Indigenous reading of *Truth and Bright Water* I trace the connection between colonial disruptions to Indigenous land relations, the loss of Two Row Wampum principles, and the

[63] I learned this Kanien'keha word from Tehota'kera:ton on 14 April 2015 while studying my Native language in the Mohawk Language Program at Six Nations Polytechnic. Translated, *aterihwahnira:tshera ne kahswénhtha* simply implies a treaty or agreement made in wampum. This is why the phrase *tékeni teyoha:te,* in English "the two rows," is also used to denote the Two Row Wampum.

[64] The Deyohaha:ge: Indigenous Knowledge Centre (IKC) at Six Nations Polytechnic is located in Ohsweken, Ontario. I am currently a member of the "Two Row Research Team," a group formed in partnership between McMaster University and the IKC that seeks to bring together community and university knowledges and methodologies.

resulting consequences of failing to follow the conduct of sharing and difference outlined by that agreement. I begin this discussion by looking at the role of buffalo in King's text, and then examining Christianity, history, and ecocide as examples of settler interference in landed citizenship. I then consider Monroe Swimmer as an Elder Brother figure who champions landed citizenship by engaging the people of Truth and Bright Water in land-centred ceremonies that combine both Indigenous and settler cultures. Monroe demonstrates how knowing your relations and carrying the land in your centre enables movement back and forth across both material markers of difference, such as the bridge and the border, and cognitive ones, such as binaries of nativism or assimilation.

Using Chadwick Allen's trans-Indigenous methodology, this chapter juxtaposes land-centred knowledge and stories from Siksikaitsitapi, Rotinonhsonni, Anishinabe, and Nêhiyawak nations. While a trans-Indigenous methodology highlights the importance of "remaining always cognizant of the complexity of the relevant Indigenous global" (xix) to the Indigenous local, I also believe that local juxtapositions of Indigenous knowledge, texts, and lifeways offer significant enrichment for reading across material and cognitive borders and conceiving of a shared citizenship with the land. Placing land-centred knowledge and stories from Siksikaitsitapi, Rotinonhsonni, Anishinaabe, and Nêhiyawak nations close together affirms Indigenous alliances with the environment and with each other, their long-standing presence on and stewardship of the land, and the value and validity of knowledge that is ancestral, adaptive and alive. A trans-Indigenous approach also seems appropriate given King's easy interweaving of diverse Indigenous histories in the text: referencing the Shawnee leader Tecumseh, North West Coast traditions such as bentwood boxes and potlatches, the Tsalagi Trail of Tears, and Tsitsistas and So'taeo'o Dog Soldiers, for example. While King does not explicitly identify the nation of the

fictional reserve Bright Water, its geographic location on the Alberta/Montana border suggests that it could be a Siksikaitsitapi (Blackfoot) community.

In *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing*, Betty Bastien explains that learning and embodying a Siksikaitsitapi ontology of interrelation is essential to the health and well-being both of the Siksikaitsitapi people and of the natural world. Within a Siksikaitsitapi worldview, human beings can only exist and can only live meaningful lives by connecting and relating to other forms of life — to an extended kinship network of their non-human relatives. Bastien writes, "Knowing who you are is knowing your relatives — and knowing your relatives is being in your centre. Being in the centre of the universe means knowing one's place in the universe, and that place is at the centre of our tribal, natural, and cosmic alliances" (95). This complex social structure recognizes spirits, land, nonhumans, and humans not only as kin, but as members of a global system who each have roles and responsibilities that contribute to upholding a natural order of balance. Finding this balance is made difficult for King's characters, especially for young people like Tecumseh and Lum, because of divisions imposed by colonialism on Siksikaitsitapi land relationships. Juxtaposing Siksikaitsitapi epistemologies of land-centrism with the Rotinonhsonni notion of having core Two Row principles gives helpful insight into the danger King's characters face in "trying to make it in the world, [and] find a comfortable zone in which to exist" ("Border" 169).

Aterihwahnira:tshera ne Kaswéntah, and especially the *Kaswéntah* space between the two purple parallel lines of the European and Rotinonhsonni vessels, holds particular significance for a *wahta*-led reading of King's text. As Onöñda'gega' (Onondaga) scholar David Newhouse explains:

> The separateness and parallel nature of the two rows has been used as an argument for the creation of a state of complete separateness from each other. We canoe alone, so to speak. The two rows denote a relationship and in my view a dialogue between nations and cultures; the three white rows signify the ethics of this dialogue: respect, honesty, and kindness. There is much to be said for noninterference in national political affairs, but not much in favor of other aspects of separateness. Not engaging with the knowledge of others, denying the knowledge of others, is inconsistent with a Guswentah philosophy of engagement. In fact engagement is required in order to live well with those with whom one shares the world. (188)

The river upon which both European and Indigenous vessels travel unites them in shared belonging to the waters that buoy them and to the broader ecology that the river represents. The three rows of white beads that constitute the *Kaswéntah* space offer a guideline for how to ethically navigate the sharing of this ecology. Creating a relationship between our nations that ensures the health of the river and so the health of the people traveling upon it requires respectful, honest, and kind engagement. The Silver Covenant Chain of Friendship represents the acknowledgement of both parties for a need to maintain engagement in a good way. The links of the chain – which connect the *onkwehonwe* on one side and the Europeans on the other – represent friendship, the good mind, and peace as guiding principles for maintaining nation-to-nation relationships. While the nations were originally connected by a rope, this metaphor was replaced by the concept of a silver chain, given how easily ropes can break. Chains, however, require maintenance and polishing to stay strong and prevent rust. “Brightening the chain” is therefore a way for us to talk about renewing our nation-to-nation, treaty relationships. It is also said that if one group is in danger, needs help, or wants to remind the other party of their

commitment, they can shake the chain to alert their allies. Given settler violation of the agreement, there is a great need to polish the chain not only for the well-being of *onkwehonwe*, but for the land itself, and all people who depend upon her. In sum, *Aterihwahnira:tshera ne Kaswéntah* is an expression of interrelation based upon our shared belonging to the river of life upon which we all depend for survival. As our shared matter, the earth is both a reason and means to ensure the continuance of peace between our nations and Creation. Therefore, the Two Row is a treaty that negotiates peace based on the earth (the river) as the shared matter of the Rotinonhsonni and European nations.

Read through the *Aterihwahnira:tshera Kaswéntah*, I offer that the river running between Truth and Bright Water can be seen as a metaphoric *Kaswéntah* space that emphasizes our shared belonging to the earth as a basis for developing relationships of respect, friendship, and peace: a shared citizenship with the land. Additionally, while the treaty reinforces the earth as our shared matter and our shared responsibility, it also says that we need to agree to be different, to not interfere in each other's ways. By articulating an agreement based upon juxtaposition (placing difference close together) rather than comparison (assuming sameness and equality), the Two Row communicates a relationship of respect for autonomy and distinctness, and also for friendship. We can each have our own individual nationalities, allegiances, and belongings that remain distinct, while simultaneously sharing citizenship with the land. This is what the Two Row expresses through its symbolism of the *Kaswéntah* River as the unifying force between human nations, a message that appears again in the Rotinonhsonni response to the European's question about what happens to those who chose to enter their sailing ship from the canoe. According to Hill, the Rotinonhsonni responded, "If this happens, they will have to be guided by my canoe" (155). In other words, engagement with and movement across difference is possible –

and, as Newhouse states, necessary – as long as onkwehonwe carry the principles of the canoe inside themselves. Like Bastien's assertion about the importance of "being in your centre" for Siksikaitsitapi well-being, the Two Row similarly emphasizes relationships with the land (or river) as essential for Rotinonhsonni well-being.

In *Recovering Canada: The Resurgence of Indigenous Law*, John Borrows describes the same kind of tribal, natural, and cosmic alliances with an interrelated universe as bringing the Chippewas of Nawash — and hopefully all humans — into citizenship with the land:

> Our births, lives, and deaths on this site have brought us into citizenship with the land. We participate in its renewal, have responsibility for its continuation, and grieve for its losses. As citizens with this land, we also feel the presence of our ancestors and strive with them to ensure that the relationships of our polity are respected. Our loyalties, allegiance, and affection are related to the land. The water, wind, sun, and stars are part of this federation; the fish, birds, plants, and animals share the same union. Our teachings and stories form the constitution of this relationship and direct and nourish the obligations it requires. (138)

In this worldview the land and all its lifeforms are not passive resources for exploitation (as they are so often viewed in the Eurocentric tradition), but active members of a society in which humans are not superior or separate. Though reflective of the meaningful life of relations that Bastien describes, here Borrows also marks these relationships as political; the use of the words "citizens," "polity," "federation," and "constitution" in reference to animals, plants, waters, and cosmic bodies asks that we extend our sense of civic duty, and multiply the polities in which we consider ourselves citizens. Coming to understand the self within the context of this landed citizenship is what Bastien calls "being in your centre," and what a Two Row perspective might

call being guided by canoe principles. Therefore, from Siksikaitsitapi, Anishinaabe, and Rotinonhsonni perspectives, a grounding in teachings and relationships with the land — in land-centrism — cultivates an internal balance for those who have to continually negotiate the space between Indigenous and Western worldviews. This allows them to do so with "an integrated mind, a fluxing and ambidextrous consciousness" (Little Bear 85) that is potentially entrenched in and upholds *Kaswéntah* principles of peace, friendship, and respect. *Truth and Bright Water* exemplifies both the potential of this land-centrism and its disruption by colonialism through First Nations' relationships with the Buffalo Nation.

In all three of the Siksikaitsitapi, Nêhiyawak, and Anishinaabe nations there are parallel customs, knowledges, and beliefs based upon the buffalo that while not equivalent are complementary components within a more complex Indigenous-to-Indigenous idea of a shared, land-centred citizenship. Read next to *Truth and Bright Water*, the buffalo teachings of these nations create an intertext that deepens an understanding of such land-centrism and of the novel's connections to the Two Row.

Both a significant feature of the landscape and a central place for the unfolding of events, the Horns become increasingly relevant to a discussion of relating to the land when read through Nêhiyawak oral histories of the buffalo. Acknowledging the aliveness of the land, King establishes the primacy of this geographical location: "The Horns, like Truth and the old church, are on the American side of the river, twin stone pillars that rise up from the water and meet to form a shaggy rock crescent that hangs over the river like the hooked head of a buffalo. It is an old place, silent and waiting" (*Truth* 2). In *Cree Narrative Memory*, Neal McLeod relates a Nêhiyawak story of a child who becomes lost on the prairies and is adopted and protected by buffalo. When the child's human family search for their lost child, all they can find is a gigantic

stone in the shape of a buffalo. While there are different versions of the story, in every telling the Grandfather Buffalo who cares for the young child tells him "I will provide for you." McLeod explains that "the stone was a physical reminder of the relationship between people and the rest of creation, particularly the buffalo," but it was also a reminder of some of the most important values of Nêhiyawak culture, "such as the attempt to care for those who have no one to provide for them. In all the versions, kinship is stressed" (23). The buffalo represent the interdependent relationship between the earth and the Nêhiyawak nations; both the land and the buffalo (as an extension of the land) care, provide, and protect the people as their kin. The buffalo is a symbol of the interrelation of the cosmos that tethered the Nêhiyawak to the land and allowed them to imagine kinship with their environment and ultimately with all peoples.

The buffalo stone story allows me to understand the Horns in the same way, as a signal to the people of both Truth and Bright Water (especially since they stand on the American side of things) that they have relatives in the land and that they are cared for by the land even if they no longer realize it; the Horns are waiting for the Siksikaitsitapi and settler peoples to renew their covenant with the prairies. Though divided by the Canadian/American border, which also marks the Indigenous reserve as a space separate and distinct from the settler town, the people of Truth and Bright Water both share an ecology. The Horns represent the possibility of this shared ecology unifying each community in a landed citizenship.

The Horns are not the only buffalo who try to remind the Siksikaitsitapi of their belonging to the earth. Bought by the band council to increase tourism, the handful of living buffalo left on the prairies possess transformative powers that allow them to become part of the land; the small herd of buffalo "appear out of nowhere" and then just as mysteriously "they stop and turn back into rocks" (*Truth* 112). From a Siksikaitsitapi worldview, the fluidity of the

buffalos' embodiment reflects belief that "spiritual energies permeate the cosmic universe" from a shared source of life, *Ihtsipaitapiiyopa*, and that these "energies manifest in physical form, and from them Niitapaissao'pi (the nature of being) is created" (Bastien 3). According to this view, all life comes from one unified source and, though it may be embodied differently, these spiritual energies "are the ultimate substance of the universe from which all life forms originate" (4). Therefore, the spiritual energy and source of life that enlivens us as humans is the same source and energy that enlivens rivers, prairies, rocks, and buffalo; this is a reality of interrelationship.

Perhaps surprisingly, Elvin, one of King's characters who most buys into exploiting and commodifying the land, reveals familiarity with the buffalo's ability to return to the source of life. Challenging history's claim that the buffalo were singularly exterminated by railroad sharpshooters, Elvin swears that "Most of them just took off and never came back." As "soon as the smart ones got a good look at Whites, they took off," he explains, before lamenting that the "Indian" did not do the same (*Truth* 95). Nêhiyawak oral history tells much the same story. According to Neal McLeod, his ancestors described "the retreat of the buffalo into the ground as kotawiwak ('they enter into the ground')" (McLeod 93). Upon the arrival of Europeans, many buffalo perceived the threat of colonialism and chose to return to the earth. Sharing a deeply interconnected relationship with *Ihtsipaitapiiyopa* (the Source of Life), the buffalo, while physically threatened, have not become spiritually displaced from All My Relations[65] and therefore maintain the ability to become one with the earth; they represent the relationship the tribe should have with the land.

When we recall the protective role of the buffalo, their retreat into the land at the arrival of the settlers could also be read as a message to their Indigenous relatives about the importance

[65] King describes All My Relations as a belief in an interrelated universe; extending kinship to all lands, plants, animals, and to "all the animate and inanimate forms that can be seen or imagined" ("Introduction" ix).

of returning to the land to ensure their safety. Nêhiyawak scholar Tasha Hubbard characterizes this return as a conscious choice of the Buffalo, a sacrifice that was made to ensure "that spirits and teachings will . . . survive, emerging out of the earth when the time is right" (78). While the Nêhiyawak may not have the physical fluidity of the buffalo, they certainly have the ability to ground themselves in land-centrism or "canoe principles." In other words, with the arrival of colonialism I read the buffalo's disappearance into the land as a teaching to the Nêhiyawak about the importance of maintaining their cultural distinctiveness through their relationship with the land. This echoes the message of the Two Row, which advises that those who have a foot in two vessels must let themselves be guided by the principles of the canoe. However, the colonial agenda to exterminate the buffalo as a strategy for ensuring Indigenous dependence massively interfered with these systems of extended kinship. In relating oral histories about *Chi-bi-shi-kee'* (giant buffalo), Edward Benton Benai portrays the terrible impact this interference has had on both Anishinaabe peoples and the natural world.

In *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway*, Edward Benton Banai outlines the sacred importance of the buffalo as spiritual guide and protector of the Anishinaabe people. According to the Anishinaabe, *Chi-bi-shi-kee'* is a very powerful spiritual guide who stands in the Western doorway of the Sweat Lodge or Sacred Hoop, the doorway to the next world and to the future (Benton-Banai 86, 112). In this position he gives strength and protection to the Anishinaabe people; however, colonization has threatened the buffalo's protective purpose. Benton-Banai explains that the religious division of Indigenous people from the Creator's original instructions to live in harmony with the land, the displacement, forced relocation, and genocide of tribal nations, and the rupture of traditional relationships between elders and youth, have broken three legs of the Buffalo. In the case of each threat, *Chi-bi-shi-kee'* sacrificed so that

the Anishinaabe could survive. When "brotherhood, sisterhood, and respect ruled over this land, this buffalo was very powerful," but after the arrival of the light-skinned race who began to "turn nations against each other," *Chi-bi-shi-kee'* was greatly weakened. In other words, when *Kaswéntah* principles of peace, friendship, and respect existed between people, and between people and the land, the buffalo were strong and the future of the First Peoples was assured; however, the violation of those principles endangers the future of both Indigenous peoples and the environment (and, consequently, all peoples). *Chi-bi-shi-kee'* knew that "if he failed in his task of guardianship, there would be no hope for Indian people to survive. He gathered all his remaining strength and stood fast to his ground. There he stands today on just one leg, striving as best he can so that Indian people might have a future in this world" (Benton-Banai 112-13). Struggling against imbalance, the Great Buffalo tries to protect a place for humans in the future, just as *wahta* does. Dying from the top down (resulting in an unbalanced crown and lopsided tree), *wahta* warns that our conduct towards the environment is leading towards a global catastrophe that could foreseeably mean the end of human beings. Not the end of the earth, the end of humans. The earth will persist, it will recover without humans. I read *wahta's* warning then, not as an angry or vengeful statement on humans' lack of futurity, but as an attempt at protecting loved ones. Repeated here again is a lesson about balance. Like Bastien's emphasis on being in your centre, and Two Row teachings about carrying canoe principles within you, Benton-Benai stresses the importance of landed relationships, here epitomized by the buffalo, for maintaining balance. The loss of three of *Chi-bi-shi-kee's* legs evidences settler-colonialism's violation of Two Row protocols for respecting the autonomy of canoe beliefs and laws, and of *Kaswéntah* principles of respect, friendship, and peace.

Spiritual and physical dependence upon the buffalo has long kept them at the centre of tribal consciousness for the Siksikaitsitapi, Nêhiyawak, Anishinaabe, and Plains people, making the Euro-American slaughter of these creatures in the millions a profound and permanent blow to these nations. Recalling his peoples' relationship with the buffalo, John Fire Lame Deer affirms that for the Mnikhówožu-Lakhóta "The buffalo was part of us, his flesh and blood being absorbed by us until it became our own flesh and blood. Our clothing, our tipis, everything we needed for life came from the buffalo's body. It was hard to say where the animal ended and the man began" (269). Extermination of the buffalo during the 1880s allowed the US and Canadian governments to force Indigenous nations onto reservations; with only handfuls of buffalo left to feed entire populations, most tribes were faced with starvation and therefore reluctantly moved to reservations for government food rations (Hungry Wolf 6). Whereas prior to contact tens of millions of buffalo roamed the prairies, after their targeted slaughter by Europeans they numbered in the hundreds. Through this attempted annihilation of the buffalo, "colonial forces were able to transform the environment of the plains, practicing a sort of ecological imperialism" (Hubbard 69-70). This ecological imperialism interfered with Indigenous peoples' relationships with the land, striking at the heart of Indigenous national, tribal, and cosmic alliances.

The disruption of relations between Siksikaitsitapi and *Iiniiwa* (bison) was not only a threat to traditional lifeways and subsistence, but also an assault on Indigenous knowledge, memory, and philosophies essential to understanding relationships in ecology and nature. The result is that "there has been both a physical and psychic distancing between modern Indigenous consciousness and the animal world" (Hubbard 74). Bastien describes how losing *Iiniiwa* as a sign and site of cosmic interconnection resulted in a corresponding objectification and

commercialization of our non-human relations that has resulted in a loss of balance within the self, community, and environment:

> Traditionally, Iiniiwa is seen as a gift from Ihtsipaitapiiyopa, and it is a part of the ceremonies as well as a staple food for subsistence. The relationship with the bison shifted from a ceremonial and subsistence relationship to one of commercial use. The demise of the Iiniiwa changed the overall Siksikaitsitapi relationships of alliances with all beings of the natural world. As these relationships were altered, the traditional responsibilities and alliances between Siksikaitsitapi and Iiniiwa were also changed. The entire Siksikaitsitapi universe was affected. It was a violation of the natural laws of Niipaitapiiysinni (the cosmic universe) or the Niitsitapi lifeworld, the interdependence and interconnectedness of life. One breath affects all other alliances. In the natural world of alliances, the physical manifestations of life are derived from connections with Ihstipaitapiiyopa. This shift in relationship with fur-bearing animals introduced the beginnings of imbalance in the Siksikaitsitapi way of life. The perception and connection to the sacred had been altered, as history after the demise of the buffalo illustrates. (18)

When colonizing forces intentionally disrupted this relationship through mass slaughter of the buffalo, they not only crumbled subsistence systems for Plains societies, but also violated natural law. Unable to honour their sacred treaties with *Iiniiwa*, the Siksikaitsitapi face a crisis of kinship. Thus, *Chi-bi-shi-kee'* strains to balance on only one leg, and those straddling the Two Row river lose the stability of land-centrism and the principles of the canoe.

In the world of *Truth and Bright Water*, Franklin's get-rich-quick schemes exemplify a switch in thinking from interrelation to commodification that signifies the failure of Two Row relationships. Nowhere is this more evident than in the attraction he devises for Indian Days that

gives tourists the opportunity to chase after corralled buffalo on motorcycles and shoot them with paintballs. In an allusion that connects Franklin's money-making venture and his commodification of the sacred to the early settlers' strategic extermination of the buffalo, Rebecca Neugin — a ghost child survivor of the Trail of Tears — expresses her disbelief at the treatment of the buffalo through a conflation of paintballing and wasteful slaughter: "We heard they were killing the buffalo for their hides and leaving the meat on the ground to rot. . . . But we didn't believe it" (*Truth* 157). Franklin has forgotten his relations and so he treats the buffalo without respect. The practice of trying to control and contain animals by corralling, fencing, or otherwise enclosing them in man-made structures (even psychological ones) reveals a hierarchical worldview (that also gets applied to Indigenous peoples) in which humans are far superior and much separated from lesser species such as animals. "Indigenous peoples are not immune to the imposition of this world view," says Tasha Hubbard, "as the Buffalo largely remains fenced and corralled out of sight, resulting in a disconnect between our selves and the animal world" (74). Franklin's neglect of relations unfortunately extends to his son, Lum, whose body frequently bears signs of abuse inflicted by a father who has lost the principles of the canoe. This instability and these types of broken relationships are what the Elder Brother figure Monroe Swimmer tries to address by reconnecting the human communities back to their shared kinship with the land.

I borrow the term Elder Brother from Neal McLeod, who explains that the proper term for a trickster is "kistêsinaw," denoting the notion of the elder brother who "instantly assumes a state of kinship and relationship between humans and the rest of creation" (97). McLeod warns that the term "trickster" is reductive and implies that this Indigenous spiritual helper is little more than a buffoon. The term *kistêsinaw,* on the other hand, recognizes interrelation and disrupts

human-centrism, thereby providing insight into the ways in which Nêhiyawak "related to their ecology and the environment, and with other beings" (17). Leanne Simpson further clarifies that while the spiritual helper figure "assumes a role of 'buffoon' in some instances in order to be an effective teacher," there are also stories where s/he "exudes vision, brilliance, strategy and power" (74). It is important to remember therefore that Elder Brother figures like Monroe lead sometimes by good, and sometimes by bad, example, but are almost always sent to the people as spiritual guides. This is also true of the Siksikaitsitapi spiritual teacher, Naapi. While the Siksikaitsitapi do not have an Elder Brother figure, the Naapi character featured in their oral histories shares many of the same qualities as an Elder Brother. Naapi "was famous for his foibles. He could be rowdy, randy, and risible all at once," but he is also a well-intentioned spiritual being of great power who is responsible for shaping the world of the Siksikaitsitapi (Yellowhorn 170). Like an Elder Brother, and like Monroe in King's novel, Naapi cares for humans, and reflects Siksikaitsitapi relationships with the environment.

Etymologically, Monroe means "from the mouth of the river" (Powell); thus, Monroe Swimmer speaks for the river running between Truth and Bright Water — the *Kaswéntah* space. Like a voice of the *Kaswéntah* space, and the river that has "been here since the beginning of time" (*Truth* 54), Monroe represents the rights of Mother Earth, aligning him with efforts for a shared citizenship with the land. Monroe's efforts to encourage the return of the buffalo signify a desire to renew land-centred ways of knowing, to break cycles of dependency, and to reconnect Indigenous people to their sacred alliances with the natural world. Monroe elicits Tecumseh's help, and together they hammer 360 iron buffalo outlines in small groups across the prairies for Monroe's "new restoration project" to "save the world" (139). Constructing a circle of 360 buffalo symbolic of the earth's shape and the unity of Creation, Monroe uses art to mimic nature

in the hopes of reminding the people of both Truth and Bright Water of their original relationship with the land. While Tecumseh seems to share Monroe's vision as evidenced by his ability to hear a "low moaning hum" coming from "the [iron] buffalo leaning into the wind like rocks in a river" (142), it is not shared by those band members who promote Indian Days by offering tourists the chance to shoot paintballs at live buffalo. Troubled by the historical relationship between people and the buffalo, Tecumseh wonders if they remember a time "before they had to worry about Indians running them off cliffs or Europeans shooting at them from the comfort of railroad cars or bloodthirsty tourists in tan walking shorts and expensive sandals chasing them across the prairies on motorcycles" (249). This insight into the suffering of the buffalo and their ancestral right to the prairies reveals a growing understanding in Tecumseh of his place within All My Relations. This growing awareness is especially apparent in his reaction to shooting a cow with a paintball: "She swings her head from side to side as if she's scolding me, and in that moment, she reminds me of my grandmother" (160). Tecumseh realizes that the buffalo is his relation. Hoping to bring similar enlightenment to the rest of the tribe, and to the people of Truth, Monroe designs ceremonies to remind the people of their place within All My Relations.

In his efforts to restore canoe principles and land-centrism to the Siksikaitsitapi, Monroe attempts to paint, sculpt and otherwise artistically intervene in the imbalanced relationship between the people and the land. He begins this restoration of All My Relations with the church, a structure clearly symbolic of colonial histories and missionizing efforts such as residential schooling. Descriptions of the church as a "ship leaned at the keel, sparkling in the light, pitching over the horizon in search of a new world" (*Truth* 2) and its steeple as a "thick spike" that has been "driven through the church itself and hammered into the prairies" (1), are obvious references to contact, conquerors, and the systemic hurt perpetrated against Indigenous peoples

by organized religion, imperial projects, civilizing missions, and genocidal government tactics. The imagery of a spike driven into the earth suggests that these histories, their ongoing legacies, and the dysfunction between Indigenous and settler peoples damage the land itself by disrupting the relationship between the people and the land. Colonial removal policies and dislocation of Indigenous peoples from their homelands and territories — such as in the case of the Trail of Tears — combined with enfranchisement and assimilation strategies, exploitation of resources, and global capitalism all work to alienate Indigenous peoples from their connection to the land (their canoe principles) and therefore disrupt the balance of the entire interrelated kinship network. It is fitting, therefore, that in a reversal of colonial attempts at Indigenous dispossession and erasure, Monroe paints the church in such convincing camouflage that it disappears: "It's as if the church has never existed" (251). As the church stands for a set of religious and imperial ideologies that position mankind (particularly the white man) as superior to and separate from all other beings and the land, Monroe's disappearance of this "colonial spike" from and into the land affirms a worldview of relational rather than hierarchal being.

Monroe employs a similar method of restoration for "Teaching the Grass About Green" (44) and "Teaching the Sky About Blue" (50), works of art in which he places a green painted platform in the Prairie grass and a blue painted kite in the sky. The platform, though repeatedly painted green, turns yellow like the dry grass, and the kite blends into thick white clouds; both give in to the "peer pressure" (134) of the environment. I suggest that Monroe's art projects can be read as evidence of *Ihtsipaitapiiyopa,* the Source of Life from which all spiritual energies originate and become *Niitapaissao'pe* (the nature of being). Although from a Eurowestern tradition the kite, platform, and church probably appear as lifeless objects, from a Siksikaitsitapi perspective they are part of the same spiritual energy that enlivens everything in Creation, and so

it is that, like the buffalo, they can return to the land. In a sense, these artworks of Monroe's enact Craig Holdrege's practice of sensorial imagination. Recall that Holdrege observes a part of nature and forms a vivid picture of it in the mind's eye, thereby allowing an inward feeling for that part of nature that enables a strong connection with it. This in turn encourages a closer, more attentive practice of observing, and a participation that allows nature to "speak" (15). If objects such as a kite and a platform can through sensorial imagination reconnect to the land, then this bodes well for humans' ability to do so as well. This reconnection certainly seems to be the case with the church. Read together with "Teaching the Grass About Green" and the "Sky About Blue," the successful camouflage of the church seems to signify "Teaching Christianity About Interrelation." With the removal of the church, Tecumseh's vision of the land becomes fluid: "The prairies can fool you. They look flat, when in fact they really roll along like an ocean. One moment you're on the top of a wave and the next you're at the bottom" (251). Artificial borders between person and land are replaced by the fluid interconnection of All My Relations.

In her account of the ways in which colonialism has forced distance between Siksikaitsitapi and their kinship with Creation, Bastien outlines a history of settler-colonial interference in and domination over Siksikaitsitapi culture and political autonomy. She recalls missionization, forced relocation to reserves, the implementation of the Indian Act, and residential schooling as practices that led Siksikaitsitapi "away from their alliances with the natural order" (20). This was doubly enforced by oppressive legislation that banned dances and ceremonies in the 1920s and 1930s and was used to confiscate ceremonial bundles and sell them to museums. These histories resulted in a "shift from a consciousness emanating from and connected with *Ihtsipaitapiiyopa*, to the consciousness of materialism" that began "an era of imbalance and colonization," the effects of which "are as evident in contemporary society as

they were almost a century ago" (21). Monroe encounters these attempts at erasure and dispossession as an international art restorer. Hired by museums to restore landscape paintings in which unwanted images of Indians keep appearing, Monroe rebels and begins a new restorative mission to repaint Indians back into romantic landscapes painted by nineteenth-century colonial artists. This gets him into some trouble, as the museums never "wanted their Indians restored" but "liked their Indians where they couldn't see them" (*Truth* 261). This attempted erasure of Indigenous presence from the land — and from art and from history — represents a failure on the part of settler-colonialism, and its institutions, to recognize a Two Row relationship of independence and reciprocity with Indigenous peoples and cultures; they have repeatedly tried to seize control of the *onkwehonwe* canoe.

Emphasizing the failure of museums and anthropology in respecting a *Kaswéntah* space of friendship, peace, and respect between nations, Monroe also confronts their appropriation of Indigenous ancestral remains: a literal removal of Indigenous peoples from the land. Traveling to museums all over the world, Monroe rescues the bones of Indigenous children: "I found them in drawers and boxes and stuck away on dusty shelves. Indian children." "It happens all the time," he continues. "Anthropologists and archaeologists dig the kids up, clean them off, and stick them in drawers. Every ten years or so, some bright graduate student opens the drawer, takes a look, writes a paper, and shuts the drawer." Sometimes, adds Monroe, "those idiots had even forgotten where they had put them" (265).

Establishing once more his Elder Brother role as defender of All My Relations and Mother Earth, Monroe fights for the rights of ancestral bones by challenging the notion that they can be owned, studied, displayed, or commodified. Complicating borders we imagine between humans and spirits, and between life and death, Monroe's actions show that our responsibilities

to ancestors extend beyond death. A Rotinonhsonni perspective of the land recognizes that when our ancestors pass on, their bodies become part of the earth and so the earth is literally our relative. Therefore, Monroe's rescue of Native bones signifies not only resistance to Eurowestern violations of our relationships with our ancestors, but also our relationships with the earth, since they are one and the same. Striving for Indigenous survivance against commodification of the sacred, Monroe smuggles the bones in a bentwood box back to Truth and Bright Water. The bentwood box is a West Coast tradition in which an entire box is made from a single piece of wood.

Reading King's text across from T'anuu oral history may provide helpful context here. According to T'annu history, a bentwood box once held the sun, and the world was one of darkness until the Elder Brother Raven, through a series of transformations and love affairs, steals the sun from the box and flies with it into the sky, where it has been ever since.[66] Monroe puts the Native children's bones in a bentwood box, associating them with the sun, light, fire, and life. Like the Raven who steals the light and sets it free, the spiritual helper Monroe Swimmer steals Native bones and sets them free so that they may return to their Mother, the earth. When Tecumseh asks Monroe why he brings the bones — which must represent countless, diverse Indigenous nations — to the river in Truth and Bright Water, Monroe exclaims, "This is the centre of the universe. Where else would I bring them? Where else would they want to be?" (265). Museums lock away the bones of these children in drawers, treating them as if they are lifeless; but when released into the river they reconnect to the oneness of *Ihstipaitapiiyopa*. Returning the bones to the river is reuniting them with their relatives, and as Bastien affirms,

[66] For a full version of this story, see William Reid, The Raven Steals the Light (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1984).

"knowing your relatives is being in your centre," and being at the centre of tribal, natural, and cosmic alliances means "being in the centre of the universe" (95).

That Monroe treats the Shield River as the "centre of the universe," a place where sacred alliances with an extended kinship network are affirmed, supports a reading of the river as a *Kaswéntah* space. Monroe gives the bones to the river to honour sacred alliances humans have with the earth, and in doing so evokes the sacred alliances we humans are meant to have with one another. In a ceremony of repatriation that returns the bones to the rivers of the *Kaswéntah* space, Monroe represents the possibilities of remembering our Two Row nation-to-nation relationships through sharing citizenship with the land. The faith of our ancestors, All My Relations, is not context-bound; it has value for more than Indigenous peoples and cannot be contained by reservations or national borders. In the end, the *Kaswéntah* River accepts both the bones of Native children, and the biohazardous bins from Truth, which also contain human remains (87). Monroe's ceremony of repatriation is a reminder that the people of both Truth and Bright Water rely on the land and return to the earth upon their death; ultimately, there are no borders.

In formalizing their Two Row relationship with the Dutch, the Rotinonhsonni warned that for those who try to have one foot in the canoe and one in the ship, a great wind will blow the boats far apart and those people will fall into the water between the boats, and "there is no living soul who will be able to bring them back to the right way given by the Creator but only one — the Creator himself" (Hill, "Oral Memory" 155). While this portrayal seems to equate the river with danger, we must recall that the Rotinonhsonni also specified that movement between vessels is possible as long as *onkwehonwe* carry the principles of the canoe in their centre to give them balance in their movements back and forth. But how are members of each vessel to move

back and forth across the river unless the canoe and the ship remain at a close distance? In the symbolism of the Two Row belt, that distance consists of the three rows of beads that are the *Kaswéntah* space. Now let us consider that these three rows, standing for peace, friendship, and respect, are not static but have been joined over the years by new qualities of our nation-to-nation relationships. Given the failure of settler nations to respect *onkwehonwe* autonomy and independence, and their repeated attempts at taking over the canoe, I believe that the three rows of the *Kaswéntah* have been widened by distrust, grief, and disrespect. The further apart these bad relationships blow the vessels, the more dangerous it is to cross the river. It may come as no surprise, then, that the Shield river in King's text, the metaphoric *Kaswéntah* space, is heavily polluted. Garbage and runoff from Franklin's illegally operated landfill seeps into the river, as does contaminated waste from the hospital in Truth; the river seems at times, toxic. If we read the river as a metaphoric *Kaswéntah* space, then the implications of this toxicity extend not only to relationships that people have, or do not have, with the earth, but to those they have with one another.

This brings us back to the dilapidated bridge. I have argued above that crossing the river is especially risky for those who do not have land-centred relationships, or an awareness of their interrelationships to balance them in their crossing. We can see this struggle play out in the crossings of Tecumseh and Lum. After Lum's father Franklin beats him severely and throws him out of the house, Lum loses even the precarious sense of who his relations are, something he had managed to hold onto at the beginning of the novel. Take, for example, Lum's first bridge crossing. After they see a long-haired figure jump from the Horns, Tecumseh and Lum climb over "the chain-link fence across the entrance to the bridge" (it no longer bears a No Trespassing sign) and Lum "leans against the wire" of the bridge and says, "It could have been my mum. She

was always doing crazy stuff like that" (*Truth* 15). Tecumseh tells us that "sometimes Lum remembers that his mother is dead, and sometimes he forgets" (15). This desperate loneliness and longing for kinship leads Lum to project a mother-child relationship onto one of the skulls Monroe brings to Truth to repatriate. Tecumseh discovers the skull at Lum's camp "inside the blanket, wrapped up like a baby" (206) and later he witnesses Lum singing to the skull as if it were a baby: "I can't hear the words, just a soft melody, and as I look, I see that Lum has something cradled in his arms and is rocking it gently back and forth" (241).

This longing for relations becomes even more obvious in Lum's last encounter with the bridge. Discovering Tecumseh and Monroe as they are about to throw the skull into the river, Lum calls out to a wigged Monroe: "Is that you, mum?" (266). Invited to be part of the repatriation ceremony, Lum takes the skull to the bridge to return it to the river. Standing on the bridge with Lum, Tecumseh can see that the plywood is "weathered and split," and that it "feels thin and flimsy, hollow"; the bridge is "nothing more than a skeleton, the carcass of an enormous animal, picked to the bone" and the "whole thing's rotting" (270). As a symbol of ties between Indigenous and settler nations – like the Covenant Chain – the bridge signifies the dire need to "polish the chain."

From the perspective of the *Aterihwahnira:tshera ne Kaswéntah*, the bridge that crosses the *Kaswéntah* river can be read as a symbolic Covenant Chain. The thin, flimsy, and rotting wood of the bridge, together with its twisted metal, signifies a very unhealthy relationship between Indigenous and settler parties of the Covenant Chain agreement. Within the context of this nation-to-nation treaty, it is telling that only the Siksikaitsitapi seem to notice the broken

state of the bridge or gather at the riverside. The settler peoples of Truth remain conspicuously absent; they show no sign of interest in Monroe's campaign to restore shared belonging.[67]

Apathetic to the condition of the bridge (or perhaps counting on it), Lum says his last farewells to one of the skulls of an Indigenous child stolen by museum curators: "Baby wants to say goodbye . . . Bye-bye baby . . . bye-bye" (271). Tecumseh's instinct in this moment is to return home to "have some of [his] mother's potatoes" (271), but Lum, who has just been forced to part with the only sense of kinship he had left, breaks into a run and "glides along the naked girders gracefully" (272). If the bridge is a metaphoric Covenant Chain, then Lum's race across its broken, rusted links is an Indigenous call to the European ship to wake up, to attend to the neglected state of the Chain, and the needs of the Indigenous nations on the other side of the river. Lum shakes the Chain, but no one answers: he runs "until the curve of the bridge begins its descent into Bright Water and [he] . . . disappear[s] over the edge" (272). In a tragic fulfilment of the Rotinonhsonni prophecy, King shows us the danger of trying to cross the bridge without knowing our relations, without carrying the canoe principles of interrelation in our centre to keep us balanced. More than this, Lum's suicide also signifies that whether they acknowledge it or not (and this is part of the problem), settler peoples and nations are hugely influential on the health and well-being (or oppression and ill-being) of Indigenous peoples. Given this, perhaps internalizing ecological holism is not enough to guarantee survival for Indigenous peoples. Settlers too, must attend to treaty relationships (including those we have with the earth) if the Kaswéntah space is to become one of peace, good mindedness, and respect again. Lum jumps halfway across the bridge "at a point that is neither the reserve . . . nor the world of the colonizer: a noncolonial space; a space where the potential exists for indigenes and colonizers to meet in

[67] Thanks to Daniel Coleman for helping me recognize that the lack of settler interest in a Two Row dialogue is part of the tragedy of Lum's fate.

compromise; a space that does not yet exist, although the foundations are there" (Bruce 203). This is the *Kaswéntah* space. The potential that exists is for a renewed covenant of friendship, respect, and peace between nations, and the foundation for such a covenant is our shared interdependence with the earth.

Borrows suggests that if settler society made allegiances, relationships, and obligations to land and nonhuman societies their own, and adjusted their views and actions to include Indigenous land-centred institutions and ideologies, then this could enable movement towards a more inclusive citizenship based upon a shared belonging to the land. Recent examples of this kind of land-based collaboration include: the *Oceti Sakowin* No Dakota Access Pipeline (NoDAPL) protests; Idle No More (IDM) protests and round-dances; Bolivia's passing of the *Law of the Rights of Mother Earth*; and New Zealand's recognition of the rights of the Whanganui River.

The grassroots movement NoDAPL, which aimed to prevent the installation of the Dakota Access Pipeline on *Oceti Sakowin* territory in the northern US., saw settler veterans supporting frontline Indigenous water protectors in the face of armed and recklessly violent military police. The Idle No More movement saw settler environmentalists join Indigenous protests of the Canadian federal government's omnibus bill C-45 (which, among other things, loosens protections contained in the *Navigable Waters Protection Act* and provides the government with the authority to determine the surrender of any portion of any First Nation territory at any given time). In 2010 the Bolivian government passed the *Law of the Rights of Mother Earth*, which defines Mother Earth as "a dynamic living system comprising an indivisible community of all living systems and living organisms, interrelated, interdependent and complementary, which share a common destiny" (*Law*). The law further states that "for the

purpose of protecting and enforcing its rights, Mother Earth takes on the character of collective public interest" and as such, "Mother Earth and all its components, including human communities, are entitled to all the inherent rights recognized in this Law" (*Law*). Finally, in 2017 the Maori succeeded in their efforts to have the Whanganui river officially and legally recognized as their ancestor who is entitled to legal status as a living entity. Eleanor Roy, of *The Guardian*, reports that "the new status of the river means if someone abused or harmed it the law now sees no differentiation between harming the tribe or harming the river because they are one and the same." While none of these examples received unanimous settler support (in fact, they all sprang from and endured considerable racism from settler society), the moments of cross-cultural solidarity that did occur speak of the possibility of realizing Borrows' vision of a shared, felt citizenship with the earth.

This shared citizenship with the earth is what Monroe tries to bring back to the people of Truth and Bright Water. His ceremonies seek to strengthen the land-centred relationships of people from both Truth and Bright Water so they can strengthen their relationships with one another, so they can strengthen the *Kaswéntah* space between them and the bridge be made safe to cross. While the people of Truth do not heed Monroe's efforts, his use of land-centered art to try and call their attention to the Indigenous-settler relationships that need caretaking, epitomizes Weaver's description of Indigenous literature as communitist. In other words, while Monroe is unsuccessful in getting settlers to "polish the chain," his artistic, land-centered method models a real-life possibility. In fact, this dissertation tries to do the very same. It aims to gather our minds together in land-centered thinking through Indigenous narrative art; to realize *tewakatonhwentsyó:ni* as *tsi niyonkwarih:ten*, our need for the earth is our shared, global matter.

Conclusion

Following the White Roots

When Peacemaker planted *Tsioneratasekowa* he told the Five Nations gathered there that the tree would stand as a symbol of peace, and that anyone who wanted to could follow the great, white roots of the tree to find a place beneath the leaves of everlasting peace. Within the *Kayanerekowa*, story (*owen:na*) plays an important role in actualizing teachings of land-centered interrelation so that the people can remember and enact their original instructions. Our stories teach us about our relationships to Creation and our ceremonies represent and reinforce that relationship. The stories and ceremonies are meant to bring our minds together in recognition of *yethinistenha ohwentsia* as our shared matter. When we do this, we guide our minds into good thinking and that, in turn, leads to good decisions and behavior, and finally, to peace. Indigenous land-centered stories, then, are metaphoric white roots of peace.[68] Alongside oral histories, cosmologies, and other culturally foundational narratives, Indigenous literature plays a part in extending these roots. In other words, as examples of interconnected *owen:na* and *ori:wa*, Indigenous literatures that portray the intelligible essences of the earth and all nonhuman societies teach us *kenten:ron*, and reading the land – the pedagogy argued for and applied throughout this dissertation – reinforces that relationship with Creation. In a sense then, this

[68] The "White Roots of Peace" traveling educational campaign, which visited Indigenous communities, colleges, and universities across Turtle Island in the 1970s, is a practical example of how the Rotinonhsonni use *owen:na* to extend the spiritual and political message of Kayanerekowa. The message they shared was a reminder about the value of our traditional languages, ceremonies, and knowledge, and to care for the needs of our elders.

dissertation's methodology of cyclically reading between trees and texts enacts the partnership of Rotinonhsonni stories and ceremonies in grounding *onkwehonwe* consciousness in the land. Thus, Indigenous writers such as Linda Hogan, Eden Robinson, and Thomas King perform an expanded form of communitism that contributes to healing the sense of exile and pain felt by Indigenous peoples by offering perspectives of land-centrism that can reconnect us to a shared ecological kinship.

Juxtaposing these Indigenous authors and the distinct nations from which they descend is not an act of pan-Indianism but rather, of trans-Indigeneity. It is not my intention to take for granted Indigenous relationships with or views about land, but to explore through close readings of both trees and texts how *yethinistenha ohwentsia* communicates through particular places, and the nations of those places (human and nonhuman). Reading across Seminole[69], Xa'isla, and Tsalagi knowledges to Rotinonhsonni contexts is therefore an attempt at understanding land-based pedagogies and epistemologies in a way both enlarged and more precise. For example, juxtaposed readings of Seminole and Rotinonhsonni cosmologies helped me to interpret the expulsion of Atsi'tsiaka:yon from the sky world as a "sending away" meant to initiate a process of renewal without which human life could never have come to be. This theme of sacrifice also reappears in the second chapter in discussion of the Pacheenaht ceremony for taking a life of a redcedar tree. Each of these moments of sacrifice – from Atsi'tsiaka:yon, the Florida panther, and western redcedar – gestures to human reliance upon members of our shared ecological society who die so that humans may live. Part of our responsibility as *onkwehonwe* (and, I would suggest, as children of earth) is to honour and offer profound gratitude for the sacrificial sharing

[69] Though Hogan is Chickasaw, she writes from the perspective of the Taiga nation, which appears to be a fictionalization of the Seminoles of Florida.

of the earth and all nonhumans. Ultimately, we all reciprocate this sacrifice in our own deaths, as our bodies return to the earth and nourish the ecosystem.

Another example of the effectiveness of applying a trans-Indigenous methodology appears in intertextual readings of the Xa'isla personal ceremony *nakwelagila* and the Rotinonhsonni Condolence Ceremony. Placing these practices side-by-side enables a better understanding of how immersion in cold water can heal the suffering of colonialism by reaffirming Xa'isla relationships with Creation and wiping away the grief of the past. In chapter three, Siksikaitsitapi philosophies of achieving internal balance through ecological holism clarified my thinking around the Rotinonhsonni *Aterihwahnira:tshera ne Kaswéntah*, and how carrying place and landed relationships might ease movement between Eurocentric and Indigenous worlds. Similar views about Indigenous relationships with nature, and values and principles derived from landed relationships that we hold in common, are not therefore intended to signify romanticism, essentialism, or pan-Indianism. In fact, similar socio-critical thinking that appears across the chapters of this dissertation indicates, to me, that the land is a united energy who shares her teachings among her many different children.[70]

A significant part of this project is the development of an Indigenous, landed methodology. Part of the difficulty of developing this methodology is that it is based in landed pedagogies of reading trees, a skill I did not possess. Though it would have been nice to study with individuals in the community who already have skills for reading the land – hunters, gardeners, medicine people, artists, for example – time restraints and university ethics approval processes posed a barrier in this regard. As such, I was left to develop the skills to read trees on

[70] I want to acknowledge that in reading the land, I run the risk of speaking for her. This has never been my intention; rather, I seek to be an ally to *yethinisten:ha onhwéntsia*, to speak in support of her, not over her. The "findings" of this work are therefore not meant as "universal truths," but as shared insight about my own personal relationship with the earth, and extrapolations about how those insights might also signify for others.

my own. This exemplifies part of the reason I sought to write this project in the first place, as I think that by offering perspectives of landed consciousness Indigenous literature provides some of the tools necessary for learning how to read the land. With a vague sense, then, that trees have consciousness and can communicate, I set out to develop a methodology. At first I began with a tree that does not have a chapter in the present work, white pine. White pine and I have a long, close relationship and so I felt that this would be a good place to start. I spent many summer days sitting beneath a teenage white pine I knew, located on the Headwaters Trail in Ancaster. This particular tree stands within a copse of white pines, located within a primarily deciduous forest. The transition between these ecological zones is especially obvious because of the brown needles carpeting the forest floor. When the sunlight warms the shed bundles, it smells like peace.[71] One particularly warm day, sitting with my back resting on white pine and supported by a soft bed of needles, I experienced a strong feeling of wholeness, of being exactly where I was meant to be. The peace that came with this feeling was extraordinary and it made me incredibly sleepy. I sat there with little else on my mind, dozily watching the sun bead on wisps of spider silk, listening to the gentle breeze brushing white pine's hair, and enjoying the comings and goings of bees. Time seemed to slow. It became obvious that white pine has never rushed in her life. Her days are filled with stretching toward big, blue, beautiful sky, with knocking branches of neighbouring trees, feeding insects, squirrels, and birds, and cradling the earth deeper and deeper down. Her truth, that gratefully she shared with me, was a message about being slow. It was my first clue in reading trees. Their temporality is vastly different than our human one. In the work that I was to undertake, then, I would need to respect that slowness. My repeated visits with trees over many

[71] Thanks to Daniel Coleman for pointing me in the direction of *pinosylvin*, the peace-inducing vapour that pine produces. See "Antibacterial and antifungal activity of pinosylvin, a constituent of pine." *Fitoterapia* 76.2 (2005): 258–260.

hours and days (and my efforts to work with trees that I already knew) were a gesture toward this need for slow learning. This proved to be somewhat of a barrier in my research, however, as timelines for finishing a doctoral project are typically no longer than four years. Time and space limitations are also the reason that the chapter I intended to write on white pine is not included here. Her influence on this work, however, is strong and so I've made space to honour her contributions here in my conclusion.

Like with white pine, in each of my encounters with trees, I came away with new insights for evolving my methodology of reading the land. *Yotsìtsyonte o:se* taught me that reading trees requires context, and so familiarizing myself with their place is key for interpreting their communication. My experiences with *onen'takwenhten:sera* taught me more than any other tree to trust in landed consciousness and the teachings that trees can offer us. In the second chapter I was most successful at letting the intelligible essences of the ecology lead me into a process of coming to know. By this, I mean that *onen'takwenhten:sera* offered me teachings about generosity, healing, and cleansing grief that were completely unprompted. I did not have any Rotinonhsonni oral histories about redcedar – as I did with *yotsìtsyonte o:se* and the creation history – to guide my thinking, nor did redcedar's appearance garner any immediate interpretation – as *wahta's* symmetry and balanced leaves did.[72] While the absence of these guideposts caused me considerable anxiety in the beginning, their lack became a tremendous methodological benefit, as I learned to recognize that tree- and place-thoughts are not necessarily conveyed through language. I came to learn from redcedar by giving into instinct and intuition, and by avoiding the urge to force an outcome. In fact, I left Vancouver without knowing for sure

[72] While the ordering of my chapters reflects the chronology of teachings in Rotinonhsonni history (creation, condolence, *Kariwi:io*) it is perhaps important to note that this is not the order in which they were written. I wrote what appears as my last chapter on *wahta* first, followed by the chapter on *yotsitsyonte o:se*, and finally, the chapter inspired by *onen'takwenhten:sera*.

what it is I had learned. It wasn't until I began to narrate my experiences for the purposes of the chapter that I realized that what seemed like small, every day, normal encounters were in fact, teachings. This process showed me that in addition to slow, curious observation, careful reflection and reading meaning into the minutiae of ecological interactions are an important part of recognizing place-thought. Finally, in my last chapter, *wahta* exposed my false assumption that trees will communicate with me because I want them to; her silence humbled me. Though the resulting methodology of this project is not perfect – in hindsight, for example, it would be better if the trees used to lead my analysis of texts originated in the ecology represented in the text – it was successful insofar as it enacts (as opposed to only articulating) Indigenous, landed pedagogies based upon the intelligible essences of an ecology.

Another challenging aspect of my tree-reading method was that I could not predict the results. For each tree, I had to trust that landed consciousness would lead me to relevant teachings that I could apply to a text, and that each chapter would in some way be relevant to another. This meant that I wasn't able to predict patterns or common themes between the texts in order to impose some order on the arch of the dissertation as a whole. It's especially interesting, then, that at the end of this project, there do appear to be some common themes running across each chapter, each tree- and book-reading. Five themes reappear across each chapter. They are, in no particular order: the personal and cosmological importance of balance; the medicinal power of stories and land; carrying forward ancestral knowledge and relationships; managing multiple (oftentimes conflicting) belongings; and visions of Indigenous futurity. Each of these themes is also often interconnected. For example, the Maskokálgî (chapter one) and Siksikaitsitapi (chapter three) both express how holding a relationship with Creator in your centre produces an internal balance capable of withstanding external pressures (*e.g.* to assimilate, adapt tradition, move

between Eurocentric and Indigenous worlds). This balance becomes especially important in managing the multiple allegiances (the Maskokálgî use the image of concentric circles of belonging) that are the product of our globalized world, and cycling between the different identities these allegiances call for. Medicine is another theme that appears across the project. By reading *yotsìtsyonte o:se* through the Rotinonhsonni cosmology, I came to an understanding of trees and plants as medicines – both physically and aesthetically – which was a teaching that reappeared in my work with *onen'takwenhten:sera* and the G'psgolox pole. *Entsitewatahkhwennyon:ko* ("we go back on their tracks"), a teaching that came to me in my work on *Power*, appears throughout each of the subsequent texts as well. Omi walks in the tracks of her panther ancestor and rediscovers her place within Creation, which empowers her return to Kili Swamp and to traditions of singing songs that can save the world. Lisamarie finds reconnection to her ancestors by retelling their stories of place in Xa'isla traditional territories, and this allows her to perform a symbolic wiping away of grief caused by colonialism. Tecumseh finds that connecting to the land as ancestral place offers him protection from the loss of equilibrium settler colonialism and all its borders have wrought. While each of these examples stresses the importance of reconnecting to ancestors and ancestral knowledge for maintaining Indigenous consciousness, heritage, and health, it is always within the context of ensuring improved Indigenous futures and not about returning to a pure, authentic past. The dynamism of Indigenous traditions, then, is another repeated theme throughout this work. Finally, in each text and in each tree reading, I encountered the struggle to live as Indigenous (or tree) nations within a colonial context. *Yotsìtsyonte o:se's* struggle with anthracnose, the clear-cutting of redcedar, and the death of *wahta* from the top down, are all indications of violations of the relationship humans are intended to have with our ecologies. These signs of violation also appear on the

bodies of Indigenous peoples. Ama is banished, Omi is threatened with sexual assault, Lisamarie is raped and almost abducted, Tab is disappeared, and Lum commits suicide. These fictionalized violences are, unhappily, representative of the real experiences of many Indigenous peoples in our communities. Part of the difficulty of my journey in writing this dissertation, then, was confronting the dissonance between academic work (in its often abstract, theoretical, and isolated form) and the lived experiences of the people I write about. How could my research make any real, felt difference? It is perhaps telling, that a response to these questions arose out of a Two Row partnership between Six Nations Polytechnic and McMaster University that allowed me to actualize some of my research in the community. This community work was mostly undertaken in cooperation with Rick Hill at Deyohahá:ge: Indigenous Knowledge Centre (IKC) at Six Nations Polytechnic (SNP).

In the fall of 2013, I received a research assistant position at the Deyohaha:ge: Indigenous Knowledge Centre (IKC) that was paid for by McMaster's Faculty of Humanities as part of a Research Centre grant (which would later become the Centre for Community Engaged Narrative Arts). I was part of a team that developed Rotinonhsonni-centered curriculum for local Six Nations school's language and literacy programs. We provided packets to local teachers with explanations for the importance of Indigenizing curriculum, as well as sample lesson plans based upon the creation history. This project encourages the use of culturally relevant materials in the classroom in order to grow awareness in Six Nations youth about their culture and to foster pride in that heritage.

I worked for the IKC as project manager and instructor for Tyónni's/Edwahsronih: We Make It! Summer Art Program. The program aimed to guide local students in the development of stories and artwork about Indigenous knowledge themes to be published in a book for early

readers. Printed in English, Kanien'keha, and Gayogohó:no', *Carrying it Forward: Traditional Knowledge Through the Eyes of Young Haudenosaunee Artists,* offers teachings about the creation history, our food and medicine plants, our relationship to the stars, and our clan system.

In cooperation with the IKC, I also helped to organize a public lecture series at Six Nations entitled "Conversations in Cultural Fluency." Scholars and knowledge keepers from across Iroquoia came together to share their research and experience with traditional teachings foundational to Rotinonhsonni culture, identity, and way of life. These events were streamed live, recorded, and added to the IKC archives for use in curriculum development.[73]

I am also a continuing member of the Two Row Research Partnership (TRRP), a partnership between university-based and community-based researchers at Six Nations aiming to develop a bi-cultural research methodology based upon the philosophy of the Two Row Wampum.

In an effort to be upfront about the research that I do and to provide opportunity for community members to express any concern they may have with that research, I have also made several public presentations on my doctoral work. I first shared my research with fellow members of the Two Row Research Team, and then again at the Indigenous Literary Studies Association (ILSA) conference, The Arts of Community, held at Six Nations Polytechnic. I have also presented my research as part of a panel for the Centre for Community Engaged Narrative Arts at McMaster University, and for WalkingLab, a SSHRC-funded research initiative run by scholars from the University of Toronto who seek to develop walking and sensory research methodologies.

[73] https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCOrFWcqN2hCxHX2NySzYY6w/videos

Each of these opportunities to share my research and engage in community projects has led to a renewed belief in and more robust version of this work. The questions and suggestions asked and made about this research by Six Nations youths, colleagues at the IKC, audience members, language teachers, and my doctoral committee played an integral role in shaping the thinking and understanding represented on these pages. What is especially promising to me about each of these events is that *onkwehonwe* continue to have conversations about our matters not only amongst ourselves, but also with our younger brothers. Given the span of the earth's life, humans have existed for less time than it takes to blink an eye; however, for the entirety of that time, *onkwehonwe* have lived and loved this place called Turtle Island. In comparison, settlers on these lands have a new relationship with these places they call Canada and America, and could learn a lot from attending to Indigenous knowledge. In his forward to *Iroquois Creation Story,* Sotsisowah describes a vital moment in the cosmology when Shonkwaia'tishon "scoops up a handful of earth and, showing it to his twin brother declares, 'this is alive!'" (i). The aliveness of the earth and thus our responsibility to her is the message that repeatedly appears in the Indigenous literatures explored in this dissertation, and it is the intended message of the dissertation itself. This message is also carried in every tree: each leaf, branch and curl of bark, and each root that extends in an intricate, communicative network within the soil that is its creator, nurturer, and cradle, says, "this is alive!" Let us listen to our tree ancestors, those first storytellers, and follow their roots towards peace.

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GLOSSARY

All entries are in Kanien'keha (Mohawk language) unless indicated otherwise.

Anonwarore'tsherakayón:ne – Dundas (literally, the upside down hat)

Aterihwahnira:tshera ne Kaswéntah – Two Row Wampum;

Ateryen:tare – knowledge lands; to know

Atotarho – entangled

Atsi'tsika:yon – Mature Blossoms; Sky Woman

B'gwus – (Xa'islak'ala) sasquatch; big foot

Chi-bi-shi-kee' – (Ojibway) giant buffalo

Ci'xºa – (Xa'islak'ala) crabapples

Du'qua – (Xa'islak'ala) stinging nettle

Entsitewatahkhwennyon:ko – we will go back on their tracks; we will do something in the way our grandparents used to

Étho niyontónhak nè:ne onkwa'nikòn:ra – so it shall stay in our minds

Gayogohó:no' - people of the great swamp; Cayuga

Gukwas du bagwaiyas ganuxw – (Xa'islak'ala) our land where we live and harvest what we need

Hayenhwá:tha – he who seeks his mind knowing where to find it

Hiya yálgî – (Mikisúki) four teachers

Hodiyanehso – men who are of the good; chiefs; leaders

Ihtsipaitapiiyopa – Siksikaitsitapi concept of the universe as permeated by energy; source of life

Iiniiwa – (Siksikaitsitapi) bison

Isákit' imisi – (Mikisúki) Giver of Breath; Creator

aJak'un – (Xa'islak'ala) oolichan; eulachon

Ka'nikonhrí:yo – good mind

Ka'shatstenhsera – strength; ability to effect change; energy

Kanaka Maoli – Native Hawaiian

Kanien'keha – Mohawk language

Kanien'keha:ka – people of the flinty ground; Mohawk people

Kanonhses – longhouse

Kanyatariio – good/beautiful/nice lake; Lake Ontario

Karharonnion – trees of the forest

Kariwi:io – Code of Handsome Lake

Kayanerekowa – Great Law of Peace

Kayaneren'tsherakowa – Great Niceness

Kentèn:ron – spiritual bond

Kistêsinaw – (Nêhiyawak) elder brother (trickster)

Kennorenh – it is raining

Kolu'n – (Xa'islak'ala) sapling cottonwood

Kotawiwak – (Nêhiyawak) they enter into the ground

Maskokálgî – People of the Maskókî Way (Seminole, Creek, Miccosukee)

Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg – Mississauga Nishnaabeg

Mimayus – (Xa'islak'ala) pain in the ass berries (a type of blueberry)

Nakwelaa – (Xa'islak'ala) soul

Nakwelagila – (Xa'islak'ala) ritual cold water bath; a cleansing and strengthening ritual

Nêhiyáw – Cree

Niitapaissao'pi – (Siksikaitsitapi) nature of being

Nu'yem (Xa'islak'ala) – oral history and law of belief and behaviour

Nyawen'kowa – big thanks

O'nikonhra – mind/body complex

O'seranekwénhtonh – red willow; red osier dogwood

Oceti Sakowin – (Lakota) Seven Council Fires; Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota nations

Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen – Thanksgiving Address; Words That Come Before All Else

Okwire'shon:'a – trees

Onʌyoteˀa·ká – people of the standing stone; Oneida

Onen'takwenhten:sera – redcedar

Onkwehonwe – original/real people

Onkwehonweneha – in the ways of the original/real people

Ono’dja – the tooth; yellow dogtooth violet

Onoñda’gega’ – people of the hill; Onondaga

Onötowá’ka:’ – big mountain people; Seneca

Ooki – (Mikisúki) water

Orì:wa – our matters; business, matters, dealings, mutual undertaking, wills joined in common pursuit

Owén:na – words, voice, tone, discourse, rhetoric; verbal, aural, facial communication

Pahayokee – (Mikisúki) great grass water (Everglades)

Pipxs’m – (Xa’islak’ala) berries with mould on them (a type of blueberry)

Qºalh’m – (Xa’islak’ala) salmonberries

Rotinonhsonni – we build the house together; Six Nations Confederacy; Haudenosaunee; Hodinohso:ni

Rotinonshón:ni Teiotiokwaonháston – it circles the people; Circle Wampum of the Rotinonhsonni

Royaner (rotiyaner pl.) – he makes a good path for the people to follow; chiefs; leaders

Sewatokwa’tshera’t – Dish with One Spoon

Shonkwaia’tishon – Creator; he who made our bodies

Skaniatariio – Handsome Lake

Skarure – people of the hemp; Tuscarora

Sken:nen – peace; wellbeing; health

Tekawerahkwa – Breath of the Wind

Tenkatsienhì:ia’ke – it will cross over the fire

Teyonkwatonhwentsyo:ni – we need the earth, ourselves

To ni’ kannorenh – how much is it; how precious is it

Tsalagi – Cherokee

Tsi niyonkwarih:ten – our kind of matter

Tsi teyowerawenrie – the winds

Tsioneratasekowa – tree of peace

Uh’s – (Xa’islak’ala) soapberries

Wa’wais – (Xa’islak’ala) traditional, hereditary watershed area (territory)

Wahta – maple tree

Wahta ohses – maple water

Weegit – shape changing raven (elder brother/trickster figure of the Xa’isla)

Xa’isla – Haisla

Xa’islak’ala – Xa’isla language

Yakonkwe – womankind

Yethinisten:ha onhwéntsia – Mother Earth; First Woman

Yotsìtsyonte o:se – Eastern flowering dogwood

Appendix A: *Ka'nikonhrí:yo*

Principles of The Good Mind

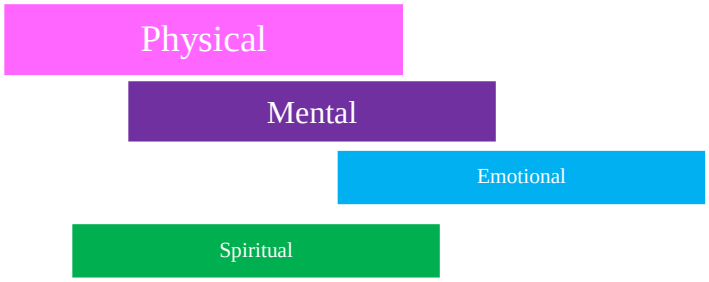
Appendix B: *O'nikonhra*

Healthy

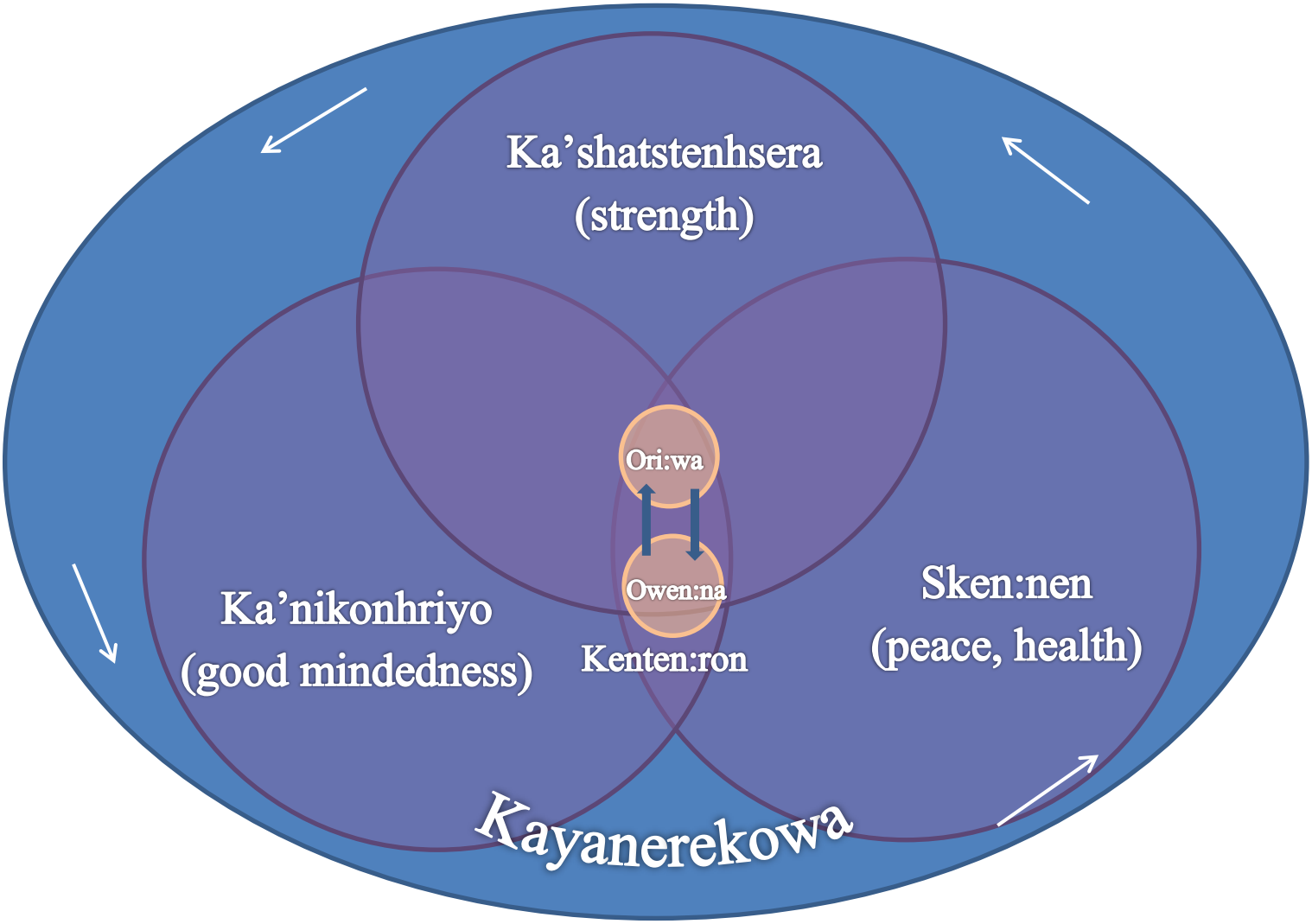
(Each aspect of health aligns and is balanced)

Unhealthy

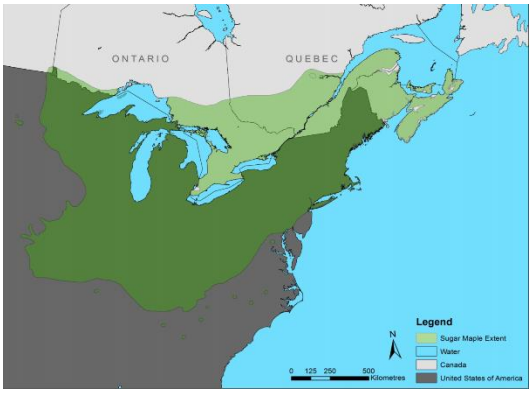
(Each aspect is unbalanced and misaligned)



Appendix C: Relationship between Principles of *Kayanerekowa*

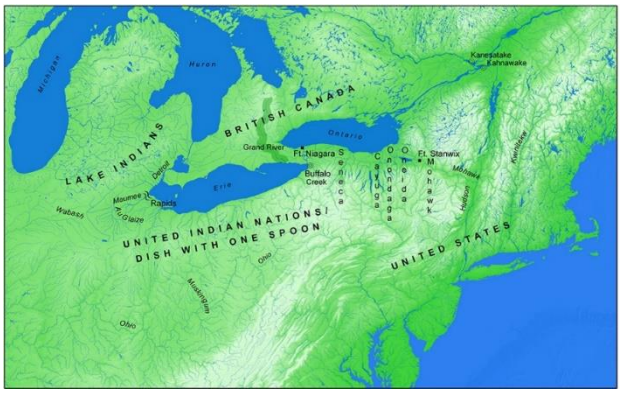


Appendix D: *Wahta* & Dish with One Spoon Territory



Natural range of *wahta*
(sugar maple)

Image taken from
"Historical Roots of Canadian Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Maple Practices"
by Ryan Huron



Ohio Valley:
The Dish with One Spoon

Image taken from *The Common Pot: the Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* by Lisa Brooks